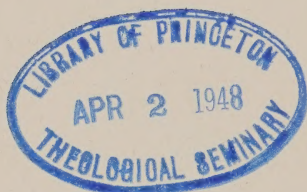


THE POLITY  
OF THE  
CHURCHES



J. L. SCHAUER



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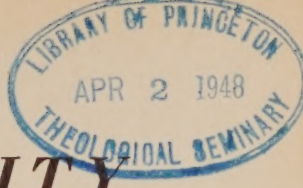






THE POLITY OF THE CHURCHES





# *THE POLITY OF THE CHURCHES*



CONCERNS ALL THE  
CHURCHES OF CHRISTENDOM

REV. J. L. ✓ SCHAVER, A.B., Th.B.

*Oak Lawn, Illinois*

CHURCH	POLITY	PRESS
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*Let all things be done  
decently and in order*

*I Cor. 14:40*



## P R E F A C E

For more than a decade previous to the writing of this volume the author had a special interest in church polity. During this time an earlier work of him went through three editions and was used as the chief guide in his denomination in matters of polity. The additional study of a very great many books on church polity, written in more than one language, lies back of this book. The library facilities of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and especially those of the larger Chicago area, have been thoroughly utilized in composing it. This volume comes from a mind greatly benefited by all this study and by almost two decades of practical experience as a minister of the Gospel.

As the author commits the manuscript for this book to the press, he does so in the sincere hope that it may assist in the promotion of good government in the Churches, wherein "all things" must "be done decently and in order" unto the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ from whom all authority in the Churches proceeds.

J. L. SCHAYER

*Oak Lawn, Illinois*  
*January, 1947*





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## CHAPTER ONE

# EPISCOPAL CHURCH POLITY

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### EPISCOPAL POLITY DESCRIBED

#### THE CHURCHES HAVING THIS POLITY

The following Churches have the episcopal polity: the Roman Catholic Church, found the world over; the Greek Catholic Church, found in Eastern Europe and particularly in Russia; the State-supported Church of England and its daughter Churches in the United States and other countries; the Methodist episcopal Churches of Europe and America; the Lutheran episcopal Churches of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark; and the Moravian Church. Especially because the large Roman Catholic Church stands committed to episcopacy, this form of church government has by very far the widest scope. The statistics for the United States of Churches having the episcopal polity are: Roman Catholics, 23,419,700; Greek Catholics, 1,155,200; Protestant Episcopalians, 2,227,500; and Methodists, 9,890,000—a total of 36,692,000. Those having the independent polity number less than one-third of this figure; those having the Presbyterian polity, only one-eighth; and those having Lutheran polity, only one-seventh. World statistics would be even far more in favor of those having the episcopal polity.

#### WAS THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH EPISCOPAL?

Considerations such as the following are advanced in

favor of the episcopal form of government: (1) it is said the Church of apostolic days was episcopal for it had three orders of officials—the apostles, the elders (or bishops), and the deacons; (2) there was superintendency already in apostolic times for Peter and John, for example, were sent by the apostles at Jerusalem to Samaria to inquire as to the conversion of the Samaritans (Acts 8:14); (3) in the days of the apostle John there already were such as Diotrephes who loved to have the pre-eminence, who refused to receive brethren, and who forbid and cast out of the church such as did receive them (III John 9, 10); (4) James is said to have had a unique authority in the church at Jerusalem, different from that of the other elders there (Acts 21:18; Gal. 2:9, 12); (5) the apostles not only, but even Timothy and Titus, are said to have ordained others to office without the consent of the people—John is said to have placed Polycarp over the church at Smyrna, and Peter is said to have placed Clement over the church at Rome; and (6) primitive bishops are said to have delegated functions belonging to their office, such as baptizing and administering Holy Communion, to elders and to deacons.

#### PRINCIPLES OF EPISCOPAL POLITY

Fundamental tenets of episcopacy are: (1) its doctrine of an unbroken succession according to which a minister must be ordained by such as stand in an unbroken succession from the apostles to the present time—Roman Catholics tracing their succession through the Popes to Peter and then to Christ, and Episcopalians, allied to the Church of England, tracing their succession to the apostles as a body and then to Christ; (2) among the clergy there is gradation of rank and office; (3) authority is intrusted to

the clergy and the body of the believers have no share in it (to which, however, present-day Methodists take exception); (4) the authority of the clergy forms the chief bond of unity, and the distinction between the clergy and the laity must be emphasized strongly; and (5) the Church must maintain a diocesan episcopate by which is meant the apportionment of the Church into areas containing several or many congregations over each of which a bishop is placed.

### THE EPISCOPAL POLITY APPRAISED

Those of Reformed persuasion allow that episcopacy may be justifiable as a matter of expediency. When the Protestant reformation in England, due to State interference, was forced to retain the episcopal form of government, Calvin, in writing to its leaders, acquiesced in that form of polity. For Poland he even recommended the episcopal form of government. And at the Synod of Dort, 1618-'19, episcopal clergy of the Church of England sat as delegates with power of decisive vote.

Episcopal polity admittedly is a strong polity. By the centralization of power in the hands of the clergy it avoids the hazards of weakness and factionalism to which the presbyterian and congregational polities are subject. But its denial of governmental rights to the people borders on tyranny; it stands opposed to the democratic spirit of the day; and, what is more, it stands opposed to the example of the apostles who themselves gave the people a voice in selecting the seven deacons and even an apostle (Acts 1:15-26; 6:2-6).

There is no sufficient warrant for the claims of episco-

pacy that it is based on Scripture and that its ministry only is the true ministry. The tremendous emphasis in episcopal circles on the doctrine of apostolic succession (evident for example in the many books written upon the subject) is a misplaced emphasis. Nowhere are we commanded to inquire concerning the apostolic succession of the ministry but we are commanded to search the Scriptures and to hold fast to the true doctrine (cf. John 5:39; I Tim. 1:13, 14; 3:14). A minister in office by way of a truly unbroken apostolic succession—if this could be proved, but it cannot—is not by reason of such succession pure in doctrine. Legal succession is no guarantee for purity of teaching and it is the latter which is far and away the more important. Moreover, the apostles in their truly apostolic character had no successors. Shrewdly and ably it has been said that “the doctrine of apostolic succession did not make the bishops but the bishops made the doctrine.”

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## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EPISCOPATE (OR—FROM ELDER TO POPE)

### THE EARLY BISHOP ONLY AN ELDER

In the days of the apostles the words “elder” and “bishop” were used for the same office. The former name had its origin among the Jews; the latter is from a Greek word and in the New Testament it is applied only to Gentile churches. In one and the same passage they who at one time are called elders are later called bishops, or overseers (cf. Acts 20:17 with Acts 20:28, and cf. Titus 1:5 with Titus 1:7). Since the office bearers of churches are



sometimes addressed or referred to as bishops and deacons, without the mention of elders, and since we know that it was apostolic custom to place elders over every church, the inference is warranted that in such passages also the name bishop stands for elder (Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:1-8). The identity of elders and bishops follows also from the identity of their qualifications (cf. I Tim. 3:2-7 with Titus 1:5-9). From the identity of their duties we must also come to the same conclusion that elders and bishops in the apostolic Church were the same persons. That there was a plurality of bishops in a single church also shows that they were elders (Phil. 1:1).

The name elder indicated his office while the name bishop (and also pastor) described his work as an overseer or one who had charge over the flock. Because of the respect in which the office was held his title was elder; in his work as an overseer he was called bishop; and as a spiritual caretaker of the flock he was called pastor. The work of an elder was both teaching and governing. Very early already a distinction arose, not of order but of function, between such as both taught and governed, and those who did the latter almost exclusively (I Tim. 5:17). That such a distinction came about is to be understood since some would just naturally be better suited to pastoral instruction than others. But the names elder and bishop continued to be used interchangeably until well into the second century, as is evident from the letter of Clement of Rome and the *Didache* or "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles." To some extent that interchange of names continued to the close of the second century and even later.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE BISHOP ABOVE THE ELDER  
(PAROCHIAL EPISCOPACY)

When the apostles had passed away, when special gifts had ceased, and when errors multiplied, the leader of the early church had to be able to refute as well as to teach and he had to give himself more fully to the ministry—by which increased application he became the more an outstanding elder. It was most natural when the elders met that the teaching elder would preside and that he soon came to preside at every meeting. This was however the only kind of preeminence the teaching elder had for many a decade after the apostles. And though such teaching elder was a bishop, as were also the other elders, it is noteworthy that the earliest documents more commonly refer to him as the president, or chairman, or the one who filled the first seat.

As time went on the importance of the chairman of the board of elders increased. He, of course, would preside at ordinations. And because his position in those times of persecution was one of greater danger, his fellow elders, or bishops, would naturally have great regard for the one who placed his life in special danger in order to serve the Church. In this gradually increased honor, prestige, and authority of the presiding officer of the early council of elders we may discern the first step from the New Testament board of elders to the papacy.

Jerome, a noteworthy historian of the fourth century, "imputes the origin of episcopacy to the capricious favoritism of the people for particular presbyters, and to the ambitious efforts of those officers who aimed to promote



themselves rather than to advance the cause of Christ, which, he asserts, produced the general consent, by little and little, to transfer the responsibility for the superintendence from the council of presbyters to a single presbyter in each church."

With the beginning of the second century, and from then onward, the names elder, or presbyter, and bishop came to be distinguished, the bishop being regarded as the head of a congregation and the elders as assistants to him and as his council. His bishopric was at first limited to his own congregation so that he was similar to a minister today in a Presbyterian or Reformed congregation. There was then at that time episcopacy but it was only parochial—not diocesan.

#### THE EMERGENCE OF SOME BISHOPS ABOVE OTHERS (DIOCESAN EPISCOPACY)

With the growth of city churches one common meeting place proved inadequate. Preaching came to be conducted also in other places in the city than the original center. They who did this came to look to the principal bishop for direction, and he assumed authority over the daughter groups. In the same way an original city congregation came to include daughter groups in outlying villages and thus the same subordinating process was still further extended. In the early stages of this development it was required that there be but one baptistery and but one Communion Table in a parish and that the members in the outlying groups attend the parent church to participate in the sacraments. In this way there was laid a foundation for the authority of one bishop over several congregations,

which authority soon came to be claimed and was also acknowledged. In this we have a definite cause for the growth of diocesan episcopacy.

By the end of the third century there were no longer but two orders in the Church, as originally, but three, the bishop having emerged above the elder and the deacon. During the third century it had also become increasingly common to seek in the Jewish hierarchy a parallel of these three offices by way of illustration and of justification; the bishop being called the chief priest; the elder, the priest; and the deacon, the Levite—though the name elder, or presbyter, continued to be used for some time after this. The common use of the word “priest” today in some of the Churches owes its origin then to the erroneous view of the early Church that its ministry was modelled after the Jewish priesthood. The use of the word “priest” for elder was moreover determined also by the influence upon the early Church of the surrounding heathenism with its priesthood and pagan religious practices. The new title of priest for the ancient elder further confirmed the use of the title bishop for the limited number known by that name though the bishop as well as the priest had his origin in the presbytery or consistory of apostolic times.

During the second and third centuries the Church had to settle questions of truth over against threatening heresy and to solve pressing problems that confronted it. To obtain unity of expression there were first held gatherings that represented churches of an indefinite region. These required a chairman who would rather naturally be the bishop of one of the largest churches. This tended to enhance the prestige of such a bishop, to increase his au-

thority, and to subordinate the other bishops of the region to him. As time went on ecclesiastical councils came to be increasingly common. They were frequently held in the capital of a political province, and commonly the presidency would fall to the conspicuous bishop of such capital who came to have a preeminence over the other bishops of the province. This is the origin of the metropolitans which term refers to such bishop of a central city. The fact that ecclesiastical organization followed political organization, and capitalized on the prestige of the latter, was a contributing factor in the progress of episcopacy.

The bishop came to be viewed more and more as the custodian of the apostles' teaching. This view by degrees led to the view that he also took the apostles' place. In matters of discipline also the bishop came to be viewed as authoritative. While at first important questions of discipline could be settled only with the approval of the bishop, this came later to be done by the bishop only. And the view that he was authoritative in matters of discipline by degrees led to the view that he possessed the authority of the apostles. The bishop who at first was distinguished from the elder only by a difference of gift or ability came later to be viewed as being of a higher office. And the difference which at first was one only of degree came later to be viewed as a difference of order or rank.

It is due to such factors as the growth of churches, the designation of priest for the common elder, the centralizing power of councils, and the need for unity as to truth and discipline, that the many separate congregations came to be grouped in areas called dioceses over each of which a bishop was placed with authority to govern. That these

dioceses were at first small may be judged from the fact that an assembly of eighty-seven bishops met in Africa in 258 A.D., and one of two hundred and seventy bishops met there in 308 A.D.

#### FROM BISHOP TO ARCHBISHOP, TO PATRIARCH, TO POPE

Though there had been a very considerable development of the episcopate by the beginning of the fourth century, there was much of the primitive Church that still prevailed up to that time. By the end of that century however those primitive characteristics had very nearly disappeared. The great change away from the primitive Church that took place during this century was very largely due to the interference of the civil government in the affairs of the Church.

Upon the adoption of Christianity by the emperor Constantine the clergy became still more prominent because of the wealth bestowed upon them. Previously they had not received a fixed income but, rather generally, they had received aid only when there was need—as in the case of widows or orphans. Previously they rather commonly made their own livelihood, secular work being viewed as consistent with the office. Previously they were not exempt from public duties and the holding of civil office which frequently involved great expenditure. But all this changed when the civil government itself became favorable toward Christianity. Constantine ordered that ministers should receive a definite allowance. Roman citizens bequeathed land to the Church and the bishop became a great landowner. Many of the clergy became a moneyed class, able even to make loans.

The civic rulers viewed the Church (which in its government had become modelled after the empire) as a tool which could serve their interests. Its unity served to solidify the empire. The promotion of ecclesiastical unity furthered also the unification of the realm. Hence the interest of the crown in even calling ecumenical Church councils, presiding over them, and settling controversies within the Church.

It would be to the advantage of the advocates of episcopacy or papacy if it could be shown that the early records present us with the fact of episcopal supremacy without showing any conflict in the effort to obtain it. For from this it might be concluded that there was episcopacy from the start. However, the marks of the struggle for supremacy are plainly written upon the pages of the ancient records. As instances of this conflict there may be cited the strife between Victor and Polycrates in the second century as related by Eusebius, the love of preeminence as displayed by Cerinthus and Basilides, the envy of Demetrius who sickened at the success of Origen, and the attempts of Felicissimus who tried hard to unseat Cyprian. He who will look through the writings of Clemens Alexandrinus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen, Chrysostom, and Basil, will find in the first four centuries of the Christian era an amount of evidence of the depravity of Church leaders enough to sicken him. For therein is evidence not only of pride and grasping ambition but even of licentiousness sufficient to plainly show that large numbers of Church officials in those early centuries were unprincipled and even profligate.

The trend toward the unification of the Church con-



tinued in the fourth century also after Constantine. The bishops of the chief cities in the East were called Metropolitans and in the West Archbishops, and these presided over the bishops of their respective provinces. Above the Metropolitans and Archbishops arose the Patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, Rome, Jerusalem, and Constantinople. The Patriarchs assumed authority over two or more provinces and they ordained the Metropolitans and the Archbishops. They were the same in rights and jurisdiction but they differed in the extent of their domain and in their influence. Rome was first; Alexandria, second; and Antioch, third. After the founding of Constantinople, 330 A.D., the bishop of this city, the second capital of the Empire, vied with Rome for supremacy. In 451 A.D. these two by an ecumenical council were declared to be equal in jurisdiction though Rome was conceded to be the first in honor. The conflict between the Pope of Rome and the Patriarch of Constantinople began with that year. The Patriarch owed his power to the political significance of Constantinople while the Pope of Rome claimed that his authority reached back to the time of the apostles. The struggle of those early centuries still finds embodiment in the two Catholic Churches of Christendom, the one Roman and the other Greek. The last competitor of the Roman Pope never submitted.

In Western Europe the bishops themselves helped to increase the authority of the Pope. When they felt that the yoke of the Archbishops was too heavy, they appealed to the Pope of Rome. On behalf of the bishops were made "The False Decretals," a combination of the decrees of previous councils and previous letters of the Pope which asserted the subordination of the Archbishops to the

Pope. This interpolated collection for centuries passed for genuine and did much to establish the supremacy of the Roman bishop over the whole Roman Catholic Church.

Thus by "little and little," to use the expression of the ancient historian, the elder of apostolic days became the mighty Pope of Rome. This ascent to power that covered centuries, and is tenaciously maintained to the present time, runs counter to the words of Jesus spoken to His disciples when there was strife among them as to who should be the greatest—"the kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them . . . but ye shall not be so; but he that is greatest among you let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve." The claim of Rome that the Pope derives his authority from Peter by way of apostolic succession is without warrant either in Scripture or in history. That authority has been assumed by degrees in an age-long struggle for power. It was not granted by Christ the Head of the Church nor by any of His apostles and is contrary to the express words of Jesus that there must be equality among the leaders of His flock (Matt. 20:20-28; 23:8-10; Luke 22:24-27).

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## THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The polity of the Roman Catholic Church is not merely episcopal. In an episcopal form of government the highest authority is vested in a group of bishops who stand as a superior order above the office bearers of the local churches. The Roman Church has proceeded beyond such episcopal government to pure episcopacy, or to the papal form of

government, wherein the bishops themselves are subordinate to a still higher order, the papal order.

In the Roman Catholic Church the laity are excluded from all governmental authority—even the administration of temporalities. The laity of a parish must obey the priest, the priests must obey the bishop, and the bishops must obey the Pope, to whom they are bound by a most solemn oath. Together these orders of clergy, each order subject to the next higher, constitute a hierarchy. At the top of this ecclesiastical and governmental pyramid stands the Pope, the “papa,” or father of the Roman universal Church. He is viewed as being the successor of Peter by a direct and unbroken succession. As the successor of the primate among the apostles the Pope is the vicar of Christ and of God. He is the supreme and infallible head of the Roman Catholic Church. This claim of infallibility rests upon the claim of an unbroken apostolic succession.

Because this papal polity concentrates its strength toward a common centre, it is admittedly the strongest polity in Christendom. But that is not the same as saying that it is the most Scriptural polity or the best polity.

In 1945 the Roman Catholic population of the world was considered to be 329,775,663. These were distributed as follows: North America, 47,056,724; South America, 60,836,143; Europe, 203,944,823; Asia, 9,213,413; Africa, 6,866,072; Australia and Oceania, 1,858,488.

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## THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

### ORIGINALLY EPISCOPAL DUE TO EXPEDIENCY

The Reformation in England in the sixteenth century



was originally a monarchic movement in contrast to what it was in Scotland where the Reformation was effected by the people against the wishes of the monarch. Since the civil authorities in England at the time favored the episcopal form of government for the Church, and the right of the civic ruler to determine the outward organization of the Church was acknowledged at the time by most of the reformers, the ecclesiastical leaders of the English Reformation acquiesced in episcopacy as the polity best adapted to the prevailing circumstances. Their sympathy with the presbyterian polity however may be observed even as late as the seventeenth century when the Church of England sent four delegates to the Synod of Dort, 1618-'19, which was an assembly of the Netherlands Reformed Church having a decidedly presbyterian form of government.

In breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church the Church of England retained most of the latter's hierarchy, only cutting off the top part of the official line by renunciation of the papacy, and cutting off the bottom part of that line by taking away the orders below the diaconate.

#### NOW EPISCOPAL ON PRINCIPLE

The episcopal form of government, which the leaders of the English Reformation allowed as a matter of expediency, was later defended as being of divine right. And while in the early days of the Church of England the ordination of Presbyterian ministers who entered its ranks was allowed as valid, long since the custom has prevailed of reordaining ministers who come to it from other denominations. The Church now insists upon apostolic succession and the transmission of grace by the imposition of hands at the time of ordination.

From the first the established English Church was linked with the State so that it is as to polity not only episcopal but also erastian. Even to the present time its bishops are appointed by the civil ruler.

Within the local congregation, called parish, a number of persons, known as the vestry, is charged with the care of temporal affairs. This vestry calls the minister who is known as the rector rather than priest. A number of parishes are enclosed within a diocese over which is placed a bishop. He has supreme authority to ordain and to rule over the subordinate clerical orders and the laity of the diocese. In the parish and diocesan councils, and in the two houses of convocation, there is, at least until recently, no lay representation. The Church is divided into the two archbishoprics of Canterbury and York.

There are three distinct groups within the Church of England. The High Church Party looks upon the Reformation as a mistake, if not a crime. It regards episcopacy as belonging to the essence of the Church, in contrast to the Low Church Party. In contrast to the latter the High Church Party also maintains an advanced ritual. It is due to the High Church Party that the taking of auricular confessions has become a normal part of the duty of a parish priest—which custom however is not to be identified with the Roman confessional. The same Party has also introduced the Roman custom of giving the laity only the one sign of Holy Communion, reserving the wine for the priest. Between the High and the Low Church Parties a third Party has emerged since about a century ago. This Broad Church Party seeks to maintain a mediating position between the other two.

## THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH (U. S.)

The Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States is a daughter Church of the established Church of England. It has a total membership of 2,227,500. Its many parishes, or congregations, annually elect their vestries. These, in event of vacancy, choose the rector—usually after consultation with the bishop of the diocese. A diocese may comprise a part or the whole of a State. The highest assembly is not called Convocation, as in England, but General Convention. As in England it is composed of two houses: the one the house of deputies composed of four delegates from each diocese; and the other, the coordinate house of bishops comprising all the Protestant Episcopal bishops of the country. In distinction from the Church of England, the house of deputies comprises lay as well as clerical deputies. Lay representation is found also in the diocesan conventions. Partly owing to this example of lay representation in the United States, other daughter Churches of the Church of England (in Canada, Ireland, Scotland, South Africa, and Australia) have adopted a similar polity. This lay representation in the governing bodies of the Church is definitely a characteristic not of episcopal but of presbyterial polity.

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## THE METHODIST CHURCH

### ORIGIN AND SCOPE OF METHODISM

Methodism had its origin in the Church of England wherein John Wesley was a presbyter, or minister, to the end of his life. In England Methodists are called, after their founder, Wesleyans. The Wesleyans of England have

no bishops. American Methodism, however, is episcopal—at least in form. Its two largest branches, known since the Civil War as The Methodist Episcopal Church and The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, together with the Methodist Protestant Church, united in 1939 under the name The Methodist Church—a name which does not give special favor to any of the affiliated groups. It has a total membership of over eight million. Three other (colored) bodies of Methodists total nearly one-and-three-quarter million. There are moreover a half dozen small Methodist groups each of which have a total membership of from ten to fifty thousand persons. Of these small groups the Free Methodist Church is the largest. The world total for Methodists is more than eleven million.

#### ASSEMBLIES OF THE METHODIST CHURCH

The highest assembly of The Methodist Church is the General Conference which meets once in four years. It fills vacancies among the bishops, places bishops in their respective territories, and attends to the matters that concern the denomination as a whole. Its delegates number from six to eight hundred, half of whom are ministerial and half are lay delegates. The delegates are chosen at the Annual Conferences—the ministerial delegates by the ministers, and the lay delegates by the lay members of the minor assembly. Lay delegates may not vote on questions of ordination, doctrine, or discipline. The delegation of lay members was long a controversial subject. It became legal in 1872 when a few such delegates were seated. Since 1900 the delegation of ministerial and lay delegates has been equal. In the latter year women were also for the first time delegated.

Within a year after the General Conference there are held Jurisdictional and Central Conferences, the latter meeting for work outside the country.

Annual Conferences are held within the respective territories of the bishops. All the ministers within a territory, together with a lay member from each pastoral charge, compose the Conference. It elects elders, or pastors, who are introduced into their office by the laying on of hands of the bishop and of the other elders. It also elects deacons who are inducted into office by the imposition of only the bishop's hands. The Conference also places the pastors of the local charges.

#### THE BISHOP AND DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT

A Methodist bishop is an official of the first rank within a particular territory, and he is subject to the jurisdiction and guidance of the General Conference. He (as well as other bishops in their territories) has the power of stationing preachers though the General Conference has the right to vest that power elsewhere if it deems this to be better. The bishop determines the number of and the bounds of the districts within his territory. He appoints the district superintendents, formerly called presiding elders. These have the superintendency of discipline within their particular districts, and they have charge of all local and traveling preachers within their districts.

#### NON-EPISCOPAL CHARACTERISTICS OF METHODISM

Methodism could not lay claim to apostolic succession if it so desired. John Wesley, a presbyter of the Church of England, himself ordained the first Methodist bishop.



Methodist bishops do not constitute an order of clergy but an office. The episcopacy of Methodism is therefore not hierarchical nor in agreement with the doctrine of apostolic succession. It is a modified episcopacy. Moreover the presence of laymen in the governing assemblies of Methodism conflicts with genuinely episcopal polity. These are definitely characteristics of presbyterian church government. However, in the matter of stationing preachers the Methodist Church is even more episcopal than the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States.

## CHAPTER TWO

# CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH POLITY

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### CONGREGATIONAL POLITY DESCRIBED

#### THE CHURCHES HAVING THIS POLITY

A denomination which has the congregational or independent church polity is particularly distinguished by the fact that final authority within the denomination rests with the vote of the members of a local church. The Baptist churches in this country, both by reason of their total membership of 11,400,000 and their distinctively congregational tenets, are the most outstanding denomination in the world holding this polity. The Disciples of Christ, which have a total membership of 1,655,580, are the next largest denomination having the congregational polity. This denomination withdrew from the Baptist churches about 1810 because of their desire for still stricter conformity to New Testament precedents. Other denominations in this group are the Congregational-Christian Churches with a total membership of 1,052,000, the Adventists with 221,552, and the Plymouth Brethren with 25,806. Together these Churches in the United States have a total membership of 14,372,000. As to the number of adherents in this country congregational polity stands midway between episcopal polity with its 36,692,000 adherents and presbyterian polity with its 4,610,000. When the adherents of the congre-

gational and presbyterian polities are compared on the basis of world statistics, however, the comparison is far more favorable to the latter polity; particularly, because of the number of members in the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in Great Britain and the Netherlands, and their possessions. But world figures for either of these polities are dwarfed by the world total of those holding the episcopal polity.

#### WERE THE PRIMITIVE CHURCHES CONGREGATIONAL?

In the sense that the members of the churches of apostolic days voted for their office bearers, that they generally managed their own affairs without referring them to a broader assembly, and that they were not dependent on or were not under the jurisdiction of such broader assembly, the primitive churches were congregational in polity during the time of the apostles and for a number of decades following thereupon. We read nothing of a connectional relationship of those early churches by way of Presbyteries or Classes, and Synods or General Assemblies. To be sure, they all felt themselves to be followers of the same Savior and Lord but they had not yet discovered a way of expressing the idea of a visible catholicity in a definite ecclesiastical organization. As long as the apostles lived the primitive churches did not even feel the need for such organization because they could refer their problems to the apostles. And the apostles through their letters, messengers, and personal contacts were the visible bond which united the many local churches of their day together.

#### PRINCIPLES OF CONGREGATIONAL POLITY

The early leaders of the Congregational denomination were influenced in their church polity by the Anabaptists



of post-Reformation times. Congregational polity is strictly not an outgrowth of the Reformation. The three polities that were an outgrowth thereof are the episcopal polity which emerged in England, the presbyterian polity of Calvin in Switzerland, and the erastian polity of Luther in Germany.

The autonomy or the self-government of the local church is the most pronounced principle of congregational polity. This principle is expressed in the very name of the polity, for the name "congregational" indicates the prominence which this polity gives to the congregation. The polity is called congregational because final authority rests with the members of the local church. Without their authoritative concurrence no governmental authority is to be exercised. It is the most democratic of the polities, and it stands in contrast to the episcopal which is the most autocratic. In congregational polity each group of believers, forming a congregation, is sovereign within the limits of the congregation, and they have the right to manage their own affairs without any outside interference whatever. Congregationalists, and Baptists especially, express their principle of the autonomy of the local churches also by their insistence on being called churches—not church. They zealously affirm, for instance, that there is no such organization as a Baptist Church but that there are a great number of Baptist churches.

Congregational polity is also called independent. From the fact that the churches holding this polity stress the autonomy of the local churches it follows as a matter of course that the churches are independent the one of the other. Congregational polity acknowledges no ulterior jur-

isdiction over the local church and refuses to subject the decisions of the local church to the governing authority of a broader assembly. Any association of its churches is refused authority to overrule the power of its local constituents. This polity holds that the presence of Christ by his Spirit, as an authoritative influence, manifests itself principally in the conviction and utterance of the individual believer and that the influence of the believer therefore cannot easily go outside of the local church. Authority accordingly is accorded only to the local church.

As to the need of authoritative broader assemblies in order to express the idea of the unity of the churches (which is emphasized in presbyterian polity) the adherents of congregational polity reply that the only unity intended in the New Testament is spiritual unity and the organized expression thereof in the local church. They affirm that the only unity that has real value for Christianity is the unity of a common experience in Christ, or the unity of spirit and effort—not that of creed or organization.

Besides the principle of autonomy, and complementary to it, congregationalism stresses the principle of fellowship—a principle that is not expressed in the word “congregational” nor in the word “independent.” This polity urges the need of consultative councils, while it frowns at the same time upon authoritative assemblies. Extreme independentism is shunned as well as the authoritative encroachment of broader assemblies. Congregational or independent churches on the whole are not independent to the extreme that they refuse to reckon with the advice of an association of churches. They feel the need of such association and of heeding the advice of the broader assembly

in order to preserve the ministry from deterioration, to protect the churches from disorder and scandal, and to promote the cooperation of the churches for missionary and philanthropic effort. And the churches are expected to feel it their duty when associated together to advise and to reprove one another, and even to withdraw fellowship from a church should this appear necessary for the preservation of the purity of the churches.

### CONGREGATIONAL POLITY APPRAISED

The stress of congregationalists or independents upon autonomy makes it impossible for them, even within the bounds of their own denominations, to have any great degree of uniformity. Their church polity goes far to explain the divergence within their denominations in both doctrine and practice. While many of their ministers and congregations are opposed to the practice of infant baptism, there are some who uphold this doctrine. And while many of them are Arminian, there are others who are Calvinistic. In their rejection of a common creed independents are consistent for the adoption of such creed would imply authority on the part of the general body to determine the beliefs and practices of the members of the local churches. Consistent stress on the principle of autonomy or independentism would destroy the congregational or independent denominations. It would cut them up into numerous local democracies which again would disintegrate into ever smaller units. The principle of autonomy, if rigorously applied, would lead to ecclesiastical anarchy. However, the independents themselves do not believe in such extreme independence.

Congregational polity is not sound when it asserts that

assemblies may only advise the local church. On that basis the assembly's counsel will be effective only in event the young or troubled church is willing to acknowledge its weakness or incompetence. The church which will not acknowledge this and which spurns the proffered advice is the very one which most needs it. Still, the denomination is powerless to enforce it. The thing that saves the independent denominations from disintegration is their repudiation of their theory in practice. In practice the independent churches usually heed the advice of the broader assemblies as though it were given authoritatively. In other words, there is not in practice so wide a divergence between the adherents of the independent and presbyterian polities, with respect to the deliverances of their major assemblies, as the theoretical differences between their polities require. Consider, for instance, the practice of the independents of excluding from their fellowship an erring church until the wrong be rectified. This is an exercise of jurisdiction over the offending church as severe as any ecclesiastical body can inflict. The strongest presbyterian or episcopal government can do no more.

Independent or congregational churches have no elders, except the minister who is a teaching elder. This has not always been the case with all independent churches. In the early history of the Congregational denomination nearly all the leading churches, both in England and in America, had elders. Early independents of said denomination regarded it as repugnant to the Word of God that any minister should be the sole official ruler in a congregation. Except for those early days however in said denomination, there has not been a bench of governing elders in the independent churches. Much of the time it has been customary in

many churches of the Congregational denomination to have a committee that considered such matters as discipline beforehand and prepared them for congregational discussion and disposition. Commonly in both Congregational and Baptist congregations today the government is largely intrusted to those called deacons—this is not the position in theory but it is in practice. Though they dispute about the title, independents in practice admit what presbyterian polity maintains when it asserts the need of governing elders in every church. It would be better to imitate also the language of Scripture and call those who rule in their churches not deacons but elders. The ablest of independent writers from the earliest days of independency till now have advocated the continuence or the restoration of the elder's office. A writer, claimed to be one of the greatest authorities in Ecclesiology ever to appear among the Baptists, about half a century ago wrote "we must also acknowledge that there was a plural eldership in the apostolic churches." And he adds that it might be better for their churches to revive the plural eldership of New Testament times. A very recent Baptist authority admits that the evidences are abundant and convincing that there was a plurality of elders in each church in New Testament times and that the office of elder then was not primarily a preaching function but an administrative one—though this, as he says, "may startle and even agitate the present Baptist minister."

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## THE BAPTIST CHURCHES

### MORE CONGREGATIONAL THAN THE CONGREGATIONALISTS

The Baptist churches more strictly adhere to historic



congregational polity than does the denomination which gave this polity its name. The older writers of the Congregational denomination advocated a polity which the Baptists still practice. Baptist churches still hold to their most fundamental principle of church polity that the individual church is an independent body. However, even among Baptists there is a trend toward closer denominational affiliation and more effective organization. The Association, for example, which formerly was voluntary is not strictly so today—at least not in practice. The recognition of a church as a Baptist church now depends on affiliation with the Association.

#### ASSEMBLIES WITHOUT AUTHORITY

Starting with the belief that, according to the New Testament one church is incapable of organic connection with other churches, Baptists cannot allow the existence of an organic union of a group of churches. They permit association in order to give expression to denominational consciousness, to speak in general the sense of the denomination as a whole, and to determine those operations which are common to all the churches. They allow churches to send messengers to associate together to that end, and these may constitute themselves into an independent organization without essential organic connection with the local churches. But, when such assembly makes recommendations to local churches, Baptists insist that the right of the local churches to reject such advice must in all cases be thoroughly respected.

#### ASSEMBLIES OF BAPTIST CHURCHES

The smallest of the general assemblies of the Baptist

churches is called a District Association. Some idea of such Association may be gained from particulars as to The Chicago Baptist Association which in 1945 numbered 99 churches and over 36,000 members. Within the territory of this Association there are, besides said churches and members, 113 Negro Baptist, 15 Swedish Baptist, and 10 other Baptist churches with a total membership of 116,000. The Association meets annually, and especially as occasion requires. It is composed of the minister and two or more lay members of each congregation depending upon its size. The connection of a church with the Association depends either upon the church or upon the Association. No higher assembly determines its boundaries. And a church on the boundary line between two Associations may go to either one.

State Conventions originally were organized primarily for missionary purposes. The delegates at the State Conventions do not represent the District Associations but the local churches.

Besides the large National Convention of the Negroes, the one Baptist denomination meets in two National Conventions. These are delegated bodies. Also at these Conventions the local churches are represented directly. The churches elect the delegates to the Conventions, and they are represented directly on the floor of the Conventions by their delegates.

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## CONGREGATIONAL-CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

The Congregational Churches of our country date back to the Pilgrim fathers of the New England States. The

older Congregational writers on polity were decidedly conservative and even as late as but a few decades ago modernism among them is not plainly apparent. In 1931 the Congregational Churches merged with the Christian Churches. Their total membership is 1,052,000. The Christian Churches date back to the Wesleyan revival movements toward the end of the eighteenth century.

#### ASSEMBLIES OF THE CONGREGATIONAL-CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

When in Congregational churches a situation arose formerly, calling for advice, it was customary to call the churches of the vicinity together in what was known as an Ecclesiastical Council. Such Council was composed of the minister and a lay delegate of each of the invited churches. Appeal to the Council was not regular, and beyond it there was no appeal. In practice the findings of the Council were binding, and its decisions were in effect more than merely advisory. Of late such matters as formerly evoked an Ecclesiastical Council are brought to the attention of the District Association, or Local Conference, an assembly that meets at stated times, comprises a given district, and is composed as was the Ecclesiastical Council.

The State Conference is composed of ministerial and lay delegates which represent the churches even though they be chosen by the District Associations. Recently it is becoming the practice to send as lay delegates a man and a woman from each church and more lay delegates in the case of the larger churches.

The General Council, or National Council, which did not meet regularly previous to 1871, now meets biennially. Both the District Association and the State Conference



send delegates to it proportionate to their size . Ministerial and lay delegates are equal in number as much as possible. The Council has no jurisdictional function.

#### TREND TOWARD PRESBYTERIAN POLITY

In church polity the Congregational churches during the last century are departing from historic congregationalism and emphasizing denominational cooperation in a movement which Congregational writers themselves refer to as "the newer congregationalism." The older congregationalism would not allow local churches to be "represented" by delegates in a major assembly but the newer congregationalism since 1852 accepts the principle of representation. Formerly local problems were referred to an indefinite group of neighboring churches, especially called together for the purpose, but now it is common to bring local problems to the District Association, an assembly similar to a Classis or Presbytery of the Reformed or Presbyterian Churches. Formerly association was voluntary but now a church must be affiliated with a District Association in order to be recognized as a Congregational church by the sister churches of the community. Even Baptist writers group Congregational Churches with the Presbyterian Church under what they call a connectional form of government, and they speak of the church organization of the Congregationalists as similar to that of the Presbyterians.



## CHAPTER THREE

# PRESBYTERIAN (AND LUTHERAN) CHURCH POLITY

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## PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH POLITY

### THE CHURCHES HAVING THIS POLITY

The Presbyterian, the Reformed, and some of the Evangelical Churches are governed by presbyterian polity. The Presbyterians in ten denominations of the United States and two of Canada have a total membership of 3,789,275. In eight denominations of the British Isles the Presbyterians number 2,201,991. In South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia they number 501,925. This gives a world total of 6,493,191 Presbyterians.

The Reformed (and Evangelicals) of four denominations in the United States have a total membership of 1,041,368. In five denominations of the Netherlands the Reformed total 2,050,982. Three daughter Churches of the latter in South Africa and two in the East Indies total 845,463 members. A Reformed denomination in Hungary numbers 1,849,266. Moreover, in other European countries from Spain to Roumania, and from Italy to the Eastern Baltic States, there are Reformed and Evangelical Churches totalling 3,569,886 members. The world total of all the Reformed and Evangelical Churches having presbyterian polity is 9,356,965. The grand world total of all Presbyterian, Reformed, and Evangelical Churches is 16,604,635.

Those holding congregational polity in the United States number 14,372,000. There are besides of Baptists 667,152 in Europe, and 40,834 in Australia and New Zealand. This gives for those holding the congregational polity the sum of 15,079,986. Outside this country there are other independents besides the Baptists so that their world total is somewhat higher. It is however evident that the figure of 15,079,986 for congregational polity, and that of 16,604,635 for presbyterian polity, show that these two polities have an almost equal world total. It is well to bear in mind that the 5,127,000 Lutherans and the 9,890,000 Methodists in this country have much in common with presbyterian polity. But regardless of whether the adherents of presbyterian polity or those of congregational polity are the greater in number, the adherents of either polity are far less than those of episcopal polity. World statistics for Roman Catholics alone are 329,775,663. Besides these there are the Greek Catholics, Anglican Episcopalians, and Methodists who together in the United States alone number 13,272,000.

#### EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF PRESBYTERIAN POLITY

In criticism of the origin of the Consistory or Session in presbyterian polity it is sometimes objected that Calvin obtained his idea of this method of local church government by reason of the circumstances (including the political) which existed at the time in Geneva, and that the Consistory was rather the solution of a practical problem than the application of an exegetical principle. However, there was a Consistory at Geneva already before Calvin arrived there. When he was finally prevailed upon to stay at Geneva, Calvin, we read "at length submitted himself to the will of the presbytery and the magistrates." Also

at Basil there were elders before Calvin arrived at Geneva. Nor did Calvin first obtain his idea of the need of elders upon his arrival at Geneva. His *Institutes* were published in 1536, some months before he came to Geneva, and these contain some of the strongest declarations in favor of presbyterian principles that are to be found in all of Calvin's works.

Possibly the first reformer after Calvin to draw up a presbyterian polity was John a' Lasco who did this in 1551 for his London church which consisted of refugees from the Netherlands. In these early years, because of persecution, the Hollanders could not upon their own soil draw up a polity. By 1559 the Reformation had taken firm root on French soil as is evident, for example, from the fact that the first Reformed Synod was held there in that year. The development of presbyterian polity in Scotland began in that same year with the return of John Knox from Geneva. The first fifteen years of Scottish presbyterian polity were influenced by the polity of a' Lasco and especially by that of the French Reformed churches. The influence of the Netherlands upon early Scottish polity was negligible.

The reformers in the development of their polity tried to limit themselves to the precedents of the New Testament. They regarded as fundamental Scriptural principles such as the priesthood of all believers and the equality of ministers. Their polity developed from attempts to apply such principles, in harmony with the social and political conditions of their day, and with a watchful eye toward the various ways in which other reformers in other countries about them were solving their problems of ecclesiastical polity.

PRINCIPLES OF PRESBYTERIAN AND PRIMITIVE POLITY  
COMPARED

Not in the Reformed but in the Presbyterian Churches it has for very long been claimed that presbyterian polity is of divine right. This is now disowned by Presbyterians as an old dogma. They today acknowledge that there is no warrant to believe that their polity is the only Scriptural polity and that it is definitely Scriptural in every part. However, Presbyterian and Reformed Churches still believe that their polity comes closest to the New Testament pattern, and evidence substantiating that view appears elsewhere in this volume under the subjects of assemblies, elders, deacons, discipline, and voting.

Presbyterian polity holds that there should be a Consistory or Session in every church for the purpose of government and administration. In its insistence that there be a plurality of elders in every church, that there be a distinction between the elder who teaches (the pastor) and the elders who govern, and that the deacon's work concerns temporalities, presbyterian polity agrees with the polity of the primitive Church. Both the episcopal and the independent polities are departures from the New Testament churches in these respects.

Presbyterian polity believes that it is essential to maintain the equality of ministers—a principle which the Lord Jesus Christ himself established (Matt. 20:25-28; 23:8-10; Luke 22:24-27). Episcopal polity is a definite departure from this New Testament principle.

Another principle of presbyterian polity is the recognition of the people's right also to exercise authority in the



choice of their office bearers and in helping to decide other matters in the congregation. In this also presbyterian polity is in agreement with the primitive Church while episcopal polity in its historic sense is a departure from it.

The need of a centralized authoritative control, in order to give expression to the unity of the Church, is still another principle of presbyterian polity. The fact that the Church is essentially one must be expressed also in its visible organization. The Church as one must have an interest in every part of itself, must show this interest, and must make this interest effectual for the good of the whole. To achieve this end and to express the oneness of the Church outwardly there is therefore need of authoritative Classes or Presbyteries, and Synods or General Assemblies.

All office bearers, and assemblies of office bearers, as well as the regular members of the Church, are subject to the Lord Jesus Christ who is the supreme Head of the Church. This principle, that Christ is the supreme Ruler of the Church, makes it necessary that all be subject to His law as contained in the Holy Scriptures. These are the only rule for the faith and life of the office bearers of the Church as well as for the other members.

#### PRESBYTERIAN POLITY APPRAISED

Since it is difficult to appraise one's own polity without bias, and since there is an advantage in knowing how others view one's polity, there follows, both for our instruction and also for our encouragement, an appraisal of presbyterian polity by writers who are adherents of another polity.

As to the emphasis in presbyterian polity upon the dis-



inction between teaching and ruling elders, a Baptist writer of half a century ago said that this distinction "is not borne out by careful interpretation, resting upon only one passage of Scripture, and that not sufficiently clear as to the point involved." Likely the sharpest criticism ever written against presbyterian polity comes from the pen of an Episcopalian who four decades ago wrote as to Calvin's organization of the Church in terms of representative government that this "was originally a pagan notion and essentially a rationalistic one . . . it is a model of secular government but it is more utterly lacking in Scriptural analogy, and is more thoroly opposed to the New Testament idea of the Church than any of the rival forms of government which have been developed from Catholic principles." And the above-named Baptist writer says, as to the higher legislative assemblies and gradation of church courts in presbyterian polity, that this system "is wholly unscriptural and is but an inference from an inference." An Episcopalian writer of a century ago makes the charge that presbyterian polity is weighted down with forms and technicalities, and on this matter a Baptist writer of our day, likely with reference to presbyterian polity, says "if the accepted forms of church life import into religious experience an excess of the mechanical and formal, the result is a diminishing of the character of the believer's relation to Christ." To these criticisms—which are not all justified—the author desires to add the suggestion that the adherents of presbyterian polity should try more zealously to improve their polity. When reformers such as Calvin advanced it in Reformation times, they did not hesitate to break with tradition. Nor should we hesitate to break with our traditions whenever there is opportunity for improve-

ment. The statement, that Reformed people should be ever reforming, holds also for their polity. It is even un-Reformed to regard a matter as settled merely by a reference to the mode employed by the Reformed fathers. It is not judicious to suppose that a polity, which emerged almost entire within but a few years in reformation times, is not subject to considerable improvement by the combined study and thought of the many generations that are following upon the times of the Reformation.

By writers of a different polity many a word has also been written in appreciation of the presbyterian polity. Less than two decades ago a Methodist writer said in praise of Calvin that his "genius was notably the genius of order . . . He actualized the best thought of his age, and of subsequent generations, as an organizer." In comparing episcopalian polity, erastian polity, and the presbyterian polity of Calvin, which were made at the time of the Reformation, a living Baptist writer says that the "Calvinistic was the best type of church polity which the Reformation produced." The above-named Methodist writer also says of presbyterian polity "the direction of its influence upon civil government, on both sides of the Atlantic, has been uniformly toward authority without tyranny and liberty without license. The roll of its witnesses for religious freedom is long and brilliant." He also says that it "has witnessed well through generations and centuries for righteousness, order, and good government," and that "the strength of presbyterian polity is in its conservatism." This last thought is especially well brought out by a Presbyterian writer of fully half a century ago. After speaking of the three important principles of the three main polities—the individual right of the believer, as emphasized

by the independents; the representative character of the ministry especially commissioned by Christ, as emphasized by episcopalians; and the unity of the Church in organized form, as emphasized in presbyterian polity—he says, as to presbyterian polity that it “is conspicuous for the most just and harmonious holding of these three principles; allowing all of them their rightful influence in ordering the spiritual concerns of the individual, the local congregation, and the Church as a whole, and that it is the best adapted for universal adoption as the most desirable form of government.”

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## THE LUTHERAN CHURCHES

### SCOPE OF LUTHERANISM

The home of Lutheranism is in Germany from where already early it spread to Scandinavia, which includes Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Both in Germany and in Scandinavia the Lutheran Church is the State-supported or national Church. Wherever the peoples of these countries have spread over the face of the earth, Lutheranism is found. In the United States it is one of the largest Protestant groups. The total world population of Lutherans has been estimated to be over 60,000,000, so that they constitute the most numerous Protestant denomination in the world.

### LUTHERAN POLITY IN EUROPE

The reformer Martin Luther regarded church polity as a matter of comparative indifference. To him the essential character of the Church does not at all become manifest in the form of its government but only in the Word and in

the Sacraments. To him Christ rules in His Church through the office of preaching. Accordingly he restored the ministerial office but not that of elder or deacon. He considered some differentiation among the ministers as expedient, and he approved of the appointment of superintendents who had certain extraordinary powers and preeminence but no separate ordination. The right to appoint to office in the Lutheran Church was with Luther's approval transferred from the Pope and his subordinates to the civic ruler. Luther did not deem it safe to intrust the members of the congregations with this right.

Lutheran polity in Germany is erastian—a word which refers to the practice of the State to appoint the office bearers of the Church, to determine their powers, and to govern the Church through them. In such a system the civic prince in effect is the bishop over the Church, and political rule becomes merged with ecclesiastical government.

The earliest Lutheran Synods consisted of ministers only—naturally, for there were at first no elders. It was not until a considerable time after the birth of Lutheranism that the need was felt for a Consistory in every congregation. Its clerical and lay membership were appointed by civil authority. But the Consistory appointed the superintendent who had charge of an assigned district in its name.

In Denmark and Sweden the Lutheran Churches maintain a government that is episcopal in form to some extent. But the bishop in these Churches is not regarded as essential, as he is considered to be in truly episcopal Churches.

#### LUTHERAN POLITY IN THE UNITED STATES

The Lutherans of this country (who now have a total

membership of 5,127,000) have had a most unsettled church polity during much of their history here. By the end of the nineteenth century they had finally succeeded in agreeing to the extent that there were by then a dozen separate Synods. Since that time these have again merged so that there are today but three main bodies of Lutherans—two of them federations and the third an organic union. The comparative indifference to matters of polity in Germany, and the dependence on the civil government there, has no doubt had much to do with the difficulty of Lutherans in coming to a stable and unified polity. Their polity is difficult to describe because of the many differences among them. It has characteristics of both presbyterianism and congregationalism but resembles the former more than the latter. Generally it is, as is presbyterian polity, of the synodical type but many Lutheran congregations are independent. Lutherans differ as to the authority to be ascribed to the broadest assembly, some approaching the presbyterian standard in the matter while others remain far below it.

#### THE THREE MAJOR BODIES OF U. S. LUTHERANS

The Lutheran Synodical Conference is a federation which was organized in 1872 and has now a total membership of 1,723,072. It consists of The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other States, with a total membership of 1,356,655; The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin, and other States, with 324,492; The Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Synod of America, with 22,424; The Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, with 8,777; and the Negro Mission, conducted jointly by said four bodies, with 10,724 members. These five groups are typified by the first-named Evangel-



ical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, etc., and what can be said of it is largely true of the other groups in this federation. The Missouri Synod is almost entirely of German origin, is definitely conservative, supports Christian day schools, vigorously opposes all secret societies, practices closed communion, and permits no ministers of other Lutheran bodies in its pulpits—much less those of non-Lutheran Churches.

The American Lutheran Conference is a federation which was organized in 1930 and has a total membership of 1,635,641. It is largely of Scandinavian origin though more than 300,000 members in it came from Germany. Its leadership has been predominantly conservative. The nationally-known St. Olaf and Augustana College Choirs belong to it. This Conference consists of The American Lutheran Church, with a total membership of 584,499; The Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod of North America, with 373,163; The Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, with 595,034; The Lutheran Free Church, with 49,506; and the United Danish Evangelical Church in America, with 33,439.

The United Lutheran Church in America is an organic union like any other denomination. It was organized in 1918 and has a total membership of 1,690,204. It comprises the former General Synod, The General Council, and The United Synod of the South. Theologically this Church embraces both conservatives and liberals.

In addition to the three major Lutheran bodies, already named, there are eight smaller groups of Lutherans with a combined total membership of 77,821.





## CHAPTER FOUR

# CHURCH POLITY DESCRIBED

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### THE TERMINOLOGY OF CHURCH POLITY

By church polity is meant the extensive system by which a denomination governs itself or is governed. This system of government may be by means of the many authoritative local churches (independentism), or through these churches as gathered in the broader assemblies (presbyterian polity), or through the combined clergy (episcopal polity), or through either of the latter two in conjunction with the civic ruler (erastian polity). The word "polity" is broader in its meaning than the word "policy" though both words come from the same root. A part of a broad system of polity may be referred to as a policy. A policy is a plan or adaptation of more limited scope than a polity and it is directed to a particular purpose. To the words "polity" and "policy" is closely related the word "politics," which, if used in ecclesiastical circles, has however an unfavorable connotation, for it refers to the scheming, or policy of scheming, that is intended to favor some person or group. It would be correct to say that the churches of a denomination have all the same polity, that the policy of a local church is however to some extent determined by itself, and that an individual or a group may succeed in obtaining their purpose by shrewd, ecclesiastical politics, in defiance of good polity.

Some prefer the word "constitution" when referring to

church polity. This word, which is narrower in scope than polity, refers to the written system of rules by which the activities of the Church are directed. Often the name "church government" is preferred to church polity. The two are closely akin in meaning. Church polity emphasizes the system and church government emphasizes the authority in that system. The name "church order" is also closely akin to church polity, the former directing attention to the arrangement of the system of government whereby the churches give expression to their organization.

The name "ecclesiastical law" is not synonymous with church polity. It is usually used with reference to civil laws as these affect the Church in court procedure.

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## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHURCH POLITY

### AS SEEN IN THE NEED OF GOVERNMENT

Whenever individuals unite for any purpose whatever, there must necessarily be some kind of organization and government. Without some kind of government an organization cannot permanently exist. In all organizations there must be some persons to guide and control, and others to follow their guidance and to submit to their control. "Where there is society there must be government, where there is government there must be law, where there is law there must be penalty for its violation; where the law is violated and the penalty incurred, the law must be enforced and the penalty inflicted; otherwise the law cannot be enforced, the government cannot be maintained, and society cannot be preserved and protected. These are fundamental and well established principles of government

and constitute the basis of all forms of government, parental, political, scholastical, and ecclesiastical." From the necessity of government for every form of society there follows therefore by way of inference the need of government for the Church and the need of maintaining and enforcing such government. Under the subject of discipline, in Chapter Ten, this need is viewed from the Scriptural point of view.

#### AS SEEN IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The significance of a good church polity may be seen also by reference to the early Church. Its history is one of decline. But what a different story that would have been if only in the form of its government the Church had not first deteriorated. For it was particularly in church polity—in the office bearers of the Church taking from the laity their rightful authority—that the degeneracy of the early Church began.

Out of the ruins of the primitive Church arose the great pyramid of the Roman hierarchy. Church polity, which was neglected by the early Church to its own undoing, became the great rock upon which the universal Roman pyramid was built. The strength of Rome does not lie in its doctrines such as transubstantiation and papal infallibility; much less does the strength of Rome lie in the degree of consecration that marks its clergy. Its strength lies in the form of its government. Therein lies the explanation of why the ecclesiastical empire of Rome has outlived all secular empires. It is due to the power of its polity that Rome has withstood the ravages of time and the revolutions of empires. The general membership of the Roman

Catholic Church are no doubt not even themselves aware of the power of their polity. Roman Catholics likely feel themselves to be influenced more by their ritual than by their form of government. But a looser form of government would make for weakness and strife also in the Roman Catholic Church, and this in turn would lessen the prestige which the Church now has in the esteem of its people. The form of its government saves Rome from the divisions which so sadly divide Protestants, and their ecclesiastical patchquilt does not much impress the average Roman Catholic.

#### AS COMPARED WITH CREED AND CHARACTER

The creeds of a Church are of more importance than its polity. But it is not judicious to say that it is more important to maintain the creeds than the polity. For the maintenance of the polity is essential to the maintenance of the creed. As in the case of an individual, corruption of ethics precedes corruption of beliefs, so in denominational life decadence of polity goes before corruption of the creedal position, in a process that is likely to cover a period of several decades. In some denominations corruption in essential polity is already complete; in some even the corruption of the creedal position is far advanced.

The character of the members of a Church is of more importance than its polity. No set of rules by which a Church is governed, no matter how good it be, is any better than its administrators. No excellence of polity can compensate for want of devotion or excellence of attitude. The common lesson of ecclesiastical history is that every system of church government, no matter how perfect, is in course of time impaired by the weaknesses of human na-

ture which act upon it; and when so impaired, no legislation is able to bring it back to its original state. The greater need always is not so much better methods but better administrators.

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## THE DETERMINATION OF CHURCH POLITY

### VARIOUS VIEWS AS TO WHAT DETERMINES IT

As to the importance of the Bible in determining church polity, opinions differ. The adherents of episcopal polity say that the authority of the Church, as well as Scripture, is the basis of church polity. This is the view of Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, and those connected with the Church of England. They say that the form of government as found in the New Testament was intended only for the earliest years of the Church. To the still imperfectly organized Church the apostles gave authority to develop that earliest form with the aid of the Holy Spirit. Therefore the government which developed has divine sanction. The Roman Catholic Church, moreover, holds that the decisions of councils and popes have a validity equal to that of the Scriptures.

There are some also who magnify the importance of expediency as a basis of church polity. Those belonging to this group are the Low Church Episcopalians, Methodists, Lutherans, and some of the Presbyterians and Reformed. They say that the form of church government as recommended by Scripture is not sufficiently clear to determine the framework of ecclesiastical polity, and that we must trust mostly to the direction of expediency.



Still others are as certain, and even more certain, that the Word of God fully determines what the polity of the Church should be. This view is held by some of the adherents of each of the three main polities—episcopal, presbyterian, and congregational—both in times past and also in our day. They feel certain that Christ did not leave the Church to grope about and to guess as to so important a matter as the government of the Church which He came to establish. They say that the form of ecclesiastical government is not left to be fixed by the wisdom of man but that this has been determined by divine authority and is sufficiently clearly set forth in Scripture. They say, in the words of an Episcopal writer of a few centuries ago, “it is not possible that any form of polity, much less polity ecclesiastical, should be good unless God himself be the author of it.”

#### NO COMPLETE POLITY IN SCRIPTURE

The aforesaid views, as to the place of Scripture in determining church polity, either underestimate or overestimate the importance of Scripture. The Scriptures do not contain a polity in any sense approaching a complete scientific treatment. Neither, for that matter, do they contain a dogmatics in that sense. As the Church is called upon to build a dogmatics from the materials of Scripture, so also it is called upon to build a church polity from its materials. Scripture does not contain a church polity in detail but it does contain one in general outline. The materials for this outline are to be found almost altogether in the Acts of the Apostles and in their epistles.

The study of New Testament church polity reveals that it is characterized by simplicity and is opposed to precise

delineation. The office of elder, for example, is incidentally mentioned for the first time in Acts 11:30 without a word being said as to the establishment of this important office—though there is an account of the institution of the subordinate office of deacon. Again, though deacons were appointed to disburse alms, Stephen died as a preacher of the Gospel and Philip also preached and administered baptism—though this may be explained by their having become evangelists after their appointment as deacons. Still another instance of the simplicity of early church organization is given in the account of the church of Antioch whose delegates, in order to obtain advice, met with the apostles, elders, and membership of the congregation of Jerusalem in what is often called the first Christian Synod. And as to the making of laws touching on church polity there is a remarkable self-restraint that characterizes the apostles, which their followers, also today, do well to imitate.

#### THE MATERIALS IN SCRIPTURE FOR A POLITY

As to the circumstantial features of church government there is no guidance in Scripture but there is as to the essential features. The Bible contains the general principles of church polity which the Church must construct into a framework, and to this it must add the details as expediency requires. These general principles are to be found in express Scripture precept, in apostolic example, and in precedents set by the churches in the days of the apostles. The Word of God speaks of elders and deacons as the office bearers of the churches, it speaks of a plurality of them in every church, it speaks of the equality of office bearers, it speaks of the right of the congregation in helping to choose its office bearers, and it speaks of the need of discipline.

These are some of the general principles around which the Churches must build their polity.

The wide divergence between the several polities of the Churches today has its origin in an initial difference of interpretation of particular passages, in a difference of emphasis upon some or other passages, in a difference in the inferences that are drawn from such passages, and in proceeding in the direction of those varying inferences till the divergencies became as wide as they are at the present time. The initial differences of interpretation and emphasis are minor as compared with the later divergence of the inferences drawn and the departures in the direction of those inferences. The way for the Church to be unified in its outward organization is to direct its energies toward trying to be of one mind and of one spirit as to what the Word of God teaches about the general principles of ecclesiastical polity. The degree of divergence in the outward organization of the Churches is a *great hindrance* toward their unification.

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## TO WHOM ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITY BELONGS

### ITS SPIRITUAL CHARACTER

That ecclesiastical authority is spiritual is evident from Jesus' statement, "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21), wherein Jesus made a distinction between temporal and spiritual authority. Its spiritual character appears also from what Jesus said to Pilate about His kingship (John 18:36, 37). That it is not of this world and to be

protected by the sword is seen in the words "my kingdom is not of this world"; that it is from heaven is seen in the words "if my kingdom were of this world then would my servants fight . . . but now is my kingdom not from hence"; and that it is founded on the truth of God is seen in the words "to this end am I come into the world that I should bear witness unto the truth."

That authority within the Church is spiritual in character follows from the fact that God is the source of it, that it can be exercised only in the name of Christ, and that it is to be employed only in a moral way and not by way of force and punishment as in the case of civil authority. That ecclesiastical authority is spiritual does however not mean that it manifests itself only in an invisible way—for Jesus, though a spiritual King, reigns over both body and soul.

#### IT BELONGS PARTICULARLY TO THE OFFICE BEARERS

Congregational polity says that authority or power in the Church belongs to the whole congregation; and it says that authority belongs to the office bearers only to the extent that the people delegate it to them. If the ruling office within the Church is one of human arrangement and if it is dependent for continued existence upon the will of the people, then this position of the independents can be maintained. If the Church is like a republic in which the chosen officers carry out the wishes of the voters, then congregational polity is correct. However the Church is not a republic but a monarchy, even an absolute monarchy, wherein Jesus is King forever and His Word the unalterable constitution. And it is the King of the Church who instituted the ruling office in His ecclesiastical realm. Though

the office bearers are chosen by the people, this is but Christ's way of calling them to office, and their authority comes not from the people who chose them but from the King of the Church. Somewhat as the minister, who is chosen by the congregation, comes to it clothed with ministerial authority, not because of the votes of the people but because of the call and the ordination of God, so also the other ruling office bearers receive their authority not from the voters but from God who calls them through such election. Their dependence upon the vote of the people, in order to enter the office, does not continue in the same degree after their election. In order to function they need not ever be looking to the membership for their mandate—as independent polity says. In that polity the office bearers constitute a board that merely carries out the wishes of the people. And the people have the power of veto over the proceedings of their office bearers even when the latter are gathered together in large numbers in the broader assemblies, for final authority is said to rest with the local congregation as a whole. In such a polity the common untrained members of a local church are in effect an "upper house" having power to veto the pronouncements even of large assemblies of office bearers. This runs counter to the authority with which Christ has vested the office bearers at their appointment. If there be a ruling office, there must be power to rule. And the power to rule in the Christian Church is not as in a democracy an exercise of authority that reckons merely with the will of the majority but one which reckons first of all with the will of Christ from whom that power proceeds. To Christ the office bearers of the Church owe allegiance, responsibility, and obedience, first of all. And with their election the membership is supposed



to repose confidence in them that they will govern them with their Christ-given authority for their benefit and to His honor. Authority in the Church then belongs to the office bearers particularly, in a different way than to the rest of the membership, and for the purpose that they administer it for the benefit of the rest and to the glory of Christ.

#### IT BELONGS ALSO TO THE CONGREGATION

Episcopal or papal polity says that authority in the Church belongs only to the office bearers, and only through them can it be enjoyed by the rest of the membership. Said polity took from the people the authority which originally in the primitive Church was theirs. Even the apostles did not exercise such absolute authority as do the office bearers in episcopal polity. The apostles submitted the choice of the seven deacons, and even that of a fellow apostle, to the vote of the people (Acts 1:21-26; 6:5). They even ascribed to the people the privilege and the responsibility of testing and rejecting, if need be, those who preached the Gospel to them (I John 4:1; Rev. 2:2).

The Word of God stands opposed to any despotic rule within the Church on the part of office bearers. They may never lord it over God's heritage. Though their government of the people does not depend on the approval of the people, nevertheless, office bearers must employ every proper means of gaining the cooperation of the congregation by way of explanation, instruction, and persuasion. The wishes of the people, especially in important matters, are never to be ignored by the office bearers. Though they represent Christ first of all, they represent also the people. The decisions even of the broader assemblies must commend them-



selves to the enlightened conscience of the people—also for the reason that, unless they do so commend themselves, the purpose of such decisions will not be attained.

Authority in the Church, whether administered through the office bearers alone, or through the office bearers in co-operation with the congregation, must ever have its basis in Scripture. Neither the office bearers nor the membership are at liberty to do as they personally please. What must ever be determinative in the questions which present themselves from time to time is not what the office bearers or the membership themselves prefer but what the Word of God requires by direct precept or by implication. If a conflict occur because the office bearers acted in a despotic way or because the membership behaved in a revolutionary manner, the final, decisive authority rests with either the office bearers or the membership depending upon which is the more subject to the will of the King of the Church. Primary rights belong to the congregation as a whole. Should the office bearers seriously neglect the high interests of the Church as, for example, the leaders of the Church did previous to the Reformation, then the primordial rights of the congregation should be asserted. But only in such unusual circumstances may the congregation arise to employ its primary governing rights, in opposition to the office bearers.

#### CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS

In the period following the Reformation no congregational meetings were held in a great many of the congregations of the established Reformed Church of the Netherlands. The Consistories themselves determined the choice of their successors and other matters of importance. Their

decisions were announced to the congregations and if there were no sustainable objections, they were carried into effect. This method of said established Church was indeed aristocratic and it was in conflict with the policy followed at the time of the apostles.

A congregational meeting has no governmental authority *in the same sense* as a Consistory or Session does. Such a meeting does however exercise a certain control over the Consistory or Session—as is evident in practice for its decisions are ordinarily carried out by the council. The rules of the Christian Reformed Church and other Churches even describe the vote of the congregational meeting as decisive.

All the members of a congregation who have the right to vote should be present at congregational meetings, just as well as all members of the council should be present at council meetings. Voting is an expression of what is believed to be the will of God. Voting is therefore an obligation which calls for much thought and prayer that only His will be done. It is wrong to vote without sufficient premeditation, but also it is indeed wrong not even to take the trouble to cast one's vote.



## CHAPTER FIVE

# MAJOR ASSEMBLIES

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### ANTICIPATIONS OF MAJOR ASSEMBLIES IN N. T. TIMES

#### EARLY MANIFESTATIONS OF THE UNITY OF THE CHURCHES

The churches of apostolic times started with a genuine inner unity which is harder to achieve than the unity of external organization. Those first churches, moreover, were not without visible expression of their oneness. Foremost among these manifestations of that inner unity were the apostles themselves, who in their very persons, by reason of their epistles and their going from church to church, were a strong bond that held all those scattered local churches together. The apostles were numbered not only among the twelve who followed Jesus but they included also Matthias, Paul, and others (Acts 14:14; Rom. 16:7). The prophets, who not only expounded the Scriptures as did the teachers, but who in addition made new revelations, also labored in a more extensive field than a local church and by their itinerant labors also helped to bind the early churches together.

Early unity in the Church was made manifest also by the interest that one part of the Church had in the activities of other parts. Of this we have illustrations in the sending of messengers from Jerusalem to Samaria and

Antioch to inquire into the conversions that were taking place in the latter cities. In fact, messengers and letters were a marked feature of the early life of the Christian communities.

The unity of the many local churches in the days of the apostles was graphically made manifest also by the great collection for the Church at Jerusalem. More than a year's time was employed in the preparations for this collection. The various churches sent deputies who joined Paul at different places and accompanied him to Jerusalem, each local delegation carrying with them the gift of their particular church. This whole venture in cooperative philanthropy was a carefully planned attempt to make visible the inner unity of the widely scattered local churches.

These several manifestations of the unity of the apostolic churches were anticipations of the ecclesiastical councils which later gave expression to the unity of the primitive Church.

#### THE COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM

The most pronounced anticipation of major assemblies in apostolic days was the council of Jerusalem of which an account appears in Acts 15. It was occasioned by the problem in the church at Antioch as to whether the converts from among the heathen had to be circumcised.

That not only the office bearers but also the common members had a part in this council appears from the passages which follow. The church at Antioch sent "Paul and Barnabas and certain other of them" to go to Jerusalem "unto the apostles and elders" to inquire about the afore-said matter (v. 2). They were "brought on their way by

the church" (v. 3). At Jerusalem they "were received of the church and the apostles and the elders" (v. 4). And "the apostles and the elders were gathered together" to consider the matter (v. 6). As Peter spoke "all the multitude kept silence" (v. 12). "Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders with the whole church" to send chosen men, Judas and Silas, together with Paul and Barnabas, "and they wrote thus by them, the apostles and the elders, brethren, unto the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia" (vv. 22, 23). The council of Jerusalem therefore was called upon the request of the one church at Antioch, it was composed of the office bearers and the membership of the one church at Jerusalem with whom were gathered the delegates from Antioch, and its decisions were made applicable to the several churches of Syria and Asia Minor. It was not a general council as it is sometimes called.

That the decisions of the council of Jerusalem were not merely advisory, as adherents of independent polity claim, but were at the time considered to be binding in character (in spite of what seems to be a contradiction in I Cor. 8) is evident from the passages that follow. The apostles and elders at Jerusalem wrote unto the churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia "forasmuch as . . . certain . . . have troubled you . . . to whom we gave no commandment, it seemed good to us, having come to one accord . . . to choose men and send them . . . for it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things . . . from which, if ye keep yourselves, it shall be well with you" (Acts 15:24, 25, 28, 29). And as Paul and Silas went through the churches of Asia Minor "they delivered them the decrees to keep which had



been ordained by the apostles and elders that were at Jerusalem" (16:4).

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## THE DEVELOPMENT OF ASSEMBLIES IN THE EARLY CENTURIES

### ASSEMBLIES OF INDEFINITE REGION IN THE SECOND CENTURY

The last decades of the first century and the first half of the second century are veiled in mystery in so far as the holding of major assemblies is concerned. If one claim that no assemblies like the council of Jerusalem were held again for approximately a hundred years after the council of Jerusalem, one bases such claim on the argument of silence—a most infirm foundation. During that same period there was undoubtedly a great deal of consultation among the pastors of the local churches, who no doubt also met together in small gatherings to consider the problems that confronted them.

The earliest gatherings of churches after the apostles, for which there is historic evidence, were of very limited scope. By the year 150 A.D., it was a rule in some districts that churches of less than twelve families, in order to elect a pastor, had to call in for that purpose three delegates from three neighboring churches. These three men, meeting with the interested congregation, formed a Synod of the earliest and simplest type. Also for other purposes than the electing of a pastor similar gatherings were held in which the interested congregation would meet with a number of delegates from neighboring churches.

Difficulties created by the Montanist movement occasioned the holding of meetings in various parts of Asia

Minor about 160-180 A.D. They are referred to as gatherings of "the faithful" or "the brotherhood." The next councils of which there is knowledge are those which dealt with the Easter controversy and were held about 190 A.D. At these councils, occasioned by the heresy of Montanism and the problem as to the date of Easter, not only the pastors, elders, and deacons, but also the common members were present. All took part in the discussions and all had a voice in the decisions that were passed, leading to united action within the districts represented.

### PROVINCIAL COUNCILS IN THE THIRD CENTURY

The holding of ecclesiastical assemblies became common in the third century. About 210 A.D. councils were held frequently throughout Greece. Afterwards they were held in Africa, the earliest on record being one that convened in 220 A.D. Toward the end of the third century and later the holding of councils was a regular part of the organization of the whole Church.

The political boundaries of the provinces within the Roman Empire became also the ecclesiastical boundaries within the Church at large. The churches within a province would usually meet in the capital city or metropolis of the province, and they considered the ecclesiastical problems that pertained to their province. Their decisions, particularly in the last half of the third century, were binding upon the churches represented. They met as a rule annually but in some provinces as often as three times in a year.

At these provincial councils one of the most renowned pastors, usually of the capital city, would preside. Not only

pastors (or bishops), elders (or presbyters), and deacons were present but also as a rule the common members of the churches. During the third century the position of the laity in the councils became however less prominent. At Rome, as late as 250 A.D., the agreement of the common members, as well as of the clergy, was still considered essential to a decision. However, at a Synod held in Africa at that same time the vote of the bishops alone decided the questions. The people were still present at that time in Africa also but in the passing of the decisions only the votes of the bishops were counted. Though the people continued to be present, nevertheless, from the end of the third century onward councils came to be more and more meetings of the bishops only. The elders, the deacons, and the people of the city where the council met were present but almost entirely as spectators. And in course of time the spectators also diminished in number and finally were absent altogether.

#### INTER-PROVINCIAL AND ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

For matters that concerned the churches of a larger area than a province there came to be held from time to time inter-provincial councils. The one, for example, at Arles in southern France in 314 was a general council of the West.

While the churches continued to meet in provincial and inter-provincial assemblies, they also in the fourth century began to meet in what are known as ecumenical or universal councils. These different types of councils were all favored by the civil government because they helped to unify the empire. This support of ecclesiastical councils

by the civic rulers began in the early part of the fourth century with the reign of Constantine. The civic rulers enforced the decisions of the councils that pertained to doctrine and also those that concerned discipline.

Of ecumenical councils there are usually said to have been seven. In none of them was the Western Church represented in any full or proper sense. The seven which are acknowledged by both the Roman and Greek Catholic Churches are Nicea I in 325 A.D.; Constantinople I, 381; Ephesus, 431; Chalcedon, 451; Constantinople II, 553; Constantinople III, 680; and Nicea II, 787. Roman historians add to this list the council of Constantinople in 869, which is however rejected by the Greek Church. Other councils that have just as much a right to being called ecumenical are those of Sardica, 342; Ephesus, 449; and Constantinople, 754. Their omission can be explained only from the fact that the later development of the Church took a direction opposite to the conclusions of these councils. It is the importance and correctness of the decisions passed, and especially the consent of the orthodox Church, which determine whether an ancient council is considered as ecumenical.

The acknowledged seven councils were called together by the emperor, and he presided either in person or through commissioners in five of them. Only the bishops voted in them, though to some extent the elders (or priests) and deacons took part in the discussions. They were not stated assemblies but occasional. The council of Nicea in 325 was called to settle the Arian controversy; the council of Constantinople, 381, to dispose of the remaining Arian opposition; the council of Ephesus, 431, to settle the Nestorian,

and that of Chalcedon, 451, to settle the Eutychian controversy.

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## MAJOR ASSEMBLIES OF REFORMATION TIMES

### EARLIEST REFORMATION SYNODS

As Zwingli before him, so also Calvin started ministerial Synods. But Calvin seemed to feel no need in his day for Synods composed of both ministers and elders. The origin of major assemblies, in the historic Reformed sense, cannot therefore be ascribed to Calvin.

The first Reformed Synod was held in Paris, May 26, 1559, and it represented a few French churches. The following year the first Presbyterian General Assembly of Scotland met and it agreed on the First Scottish Book of Discipline. No Reformed Synod could be held in the Netherlands as early as this because of persecution but the churches began to hold synodical assemblies in 1563 in southern Netherlands—now Belgium.

At the convention of Wezel in 1568 leaders of the Reformed churches of the Netherlands met on foreign soil—though not as official representatives of the churches. As such official representatives they however did meet at Emden, Germany, in 1571 and there they laid the foundation for the Reformed synodical system. Thereupon the Netherlands Reformed churches met in national Synods on their own soil at Dortrecht in 1578, at Middelburg in 1581, at The Hague in 1586, and again at Dortrecht (Dort) in 1618-'19. Only the Acts or Minutes of the assemblies held in 1574, 1581, and 1618-'19 have been preserved to this day.



As in the Netherlands so also in France and Scotland the first Synods were succeeded of course by many others.

### THE INTERNATIONAL SYNOD OF DORT

The last of the afore-mentioned national Synods of the established Reformed Church of the Netherlands, the one held at Dort in 1618-'19, was the last really national Synod that Church has held to this day. For two centuries the government would not permit the holding of another national Synod. The small assemblies by which said Reformed Church has been governed since 1816 are not in any real sense national Synods.

But the Synod of Dort, 1618-'19, was a very important gathering, concerning which there are said to be 500 contemporary pamphlets in the library of the Princeton Theological Seminary at Princeton, New Jersey. This Synod was not only national but international. While all Reformed church polity of that day was built upon a national basis, the Synod of Dort was uniquely significant in that it was composed of delegates from several countries.

It was convened by the States General of the Netherlands at the request of the Calvinists, who also at the conclusion of the Synod asked their government to approve its decisions and render them effective. It was convoked to settle the controversy between the Calvinists and the Arminians in the established Church. The latter, called Remonstrants at the time, were followers of Jacobus Arminius, in whom the theological designation of Arminianism has its origin. Arminius, who for fifteen years had been one of the ministers in the collegiate church of Amsterdam and who had died a few years previous to the Synod of Dort,



was represented there by a professor and sixteen ministers who were followers of him.

From November 13, 1618, to May 9, 1619, the Synod met in 154 sessions. These sessions, which were occupied almost entirely with doctrinal matters, were all attended also by the foreign delegates whose rights were equal to those of the Netherlands representatives. In view of the foreign delegates the discussions and the Minutes were in Latin. At the close of the 154th session, when the foreign delegates had departed, the Netherlands delegates continued to meet in 26 sessions from May 13 to 29, 1619.

All the delegates previous to the assembly had bound themselves by solemn oath to express their judgment according to the Word of God and their conscience.

From the Netherlands churches there were present 37 ministers and 19 elders, and there were 4 professors from the 4 academies. The high proportion of professors present should be viewed in the light of the difficulty, the significance, and especially the doctrinal character of the problem that confronted the churches. The 19 elders also had to be well versed in Latin and this no doubt explains why their small number included no less than 5 lawyers and 7 civic officials. The Netherlands churches were then represented by a total of 60 delegates. Besides these there were 18 representatives of the Netherlands government.

The established episcopal Church of England was represented at Dort by 4 delegates, which included a bishop, an archdeacon, and a deacon—two of the four being also professors. German provinces sent 12 delegates of whom 9 were professors, and Switzerland sent 7 of whom 3 were

professors. The French churches were prevented by their government from being represented. The foreign Churches were then represented by a total of 23 delegates. There were a total of 83 ecclesiastical delegates, and these together with the 18 government representatives gave the Synod a total of 101 official delegates.

The meeting place at Dort was a spacious hall, with panelled walls and beamed ceiling, at one end of which was an open fireplace whereof the heat was likely insufficient since the delegates did not remove their heavy wraps. In the long open center near the fire was a table which seated the president, his two assistants, and the two clerks. To the side of the president's table was a very small table seating but one; and before it, in the middle of the long open center, was a large table seating fourteen persons according to the drawing from which this description is taken. Along the right and the left walls, most of the length of the hall, were three ascending tiers of high seats equipped with boards for writing purposes. Along the one wall were seated 28 and along the other 33. At the end opposite from the fire were four rows of similar seats but on the floor level and separated by a center aisle on each side of which sat 20 or 21 persons. Giving entrance to that aisle was a small gate with 6 persons standing before it. All of the men had long beards and were dressed in knee breeches, long capes, and high brimmed hats.

The Acts or Minutes of the 154 sessions were published in Latin soon after the adjournment of the Synod in 1619. A Holland translation of the Acts was published two years later. An original copy of that edition of 1621, in a very good state of preservation, is the personal property of the

author. The volume is bound by hand in pigskin and has a handwritten title on the cover. The frontispiece contains a drawing of the assembly hall from which the above description was taken. The book is 7 inches wide, 9 long, and  $3\frac{1}{2}$  thick; and it contains a total of 1300 pages. In the first 50 pages are introductions to the States General and to the churches, the latter containing an account of the controversy that preceded the Synod. Then there follows, and in the order given, 437 pages of the Acts of Synod, 356 pages of the opinions of the foreign delegates, 426 pages of the opinions of the representatives of the Netherlands churches, 4 pages of approval by the Synod of the French churches which was held October 6, 1620, and 26 pages of Index.

The Minutes of the last 26 sessions, known as the "Post Acta," were not printed till 1669.

The controversy between the Calvinists and the Arminians, both at the Synod of Dort and also before, was one of the most analytic and subtle that ever occurred. The Synod formulated the Five Articles against the Remonstrants, or the Canons of Dort, which are one of the Standards of Reformed Churches. The Synod succeeded in obtaining the expulsion of the Arminians from the established Reformed Church of the Netherlands. But Arminianism, though temporarily expelled, succeeded afterward in entering the Church again and even in pervading the national Church of the Netherlands. Arminianism also entered the established Church of England under the Stuarts. And in the great movement of Methodism, which had its origin in the Church of England, Arminianism gained new vigor. It has become a most formidable rival of Calvinism in the Churches of both Europe and America.

### PROVINCIAL SYNODS OF THE NETHERLANDS IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

During the seventeenth century, after the Synod of Dort, the Netherlands Reformed Church met in seven provincial Synods, from May to September of each year, the one after the other. To better preserve unity in doctrine and polity they sent fraternal delegates to one another. In 1694 there were 51 Classes in the Netherlands Reformed Church which Classes constituted those seven Synods. Some idea as to the scope of the national Church at that time may be gained from the size of one of these Classes which numbered 53 churches and 78 ministers. The number of Classes in said Church diminished from 51 to 44 between 1700 and 1900.

### THE BROADEST ASSEMBLIES PRECEDED THE LESSER ASSEMBLIES

The chronological order of the development of the major assemblies is typified in the case of the Reformed churches of France in the sixteenth century. The first French Synod was held in 1559. When the number of churches increased, the French Synod of 1565 instituted subordinate provincial Synods. And in 1572 Classes were formed. The same course was followed in Scotland and in the Netherlands. Within a decade or a few decades after the holding of the broadest assembly regulations were made for the formation of the lesser assemblies.

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### THE CONSTITUENCY OF MAJOR ASSEMBLIES

#### NETHERLANDS PROVINCIAL SYNODS FROM 1600 TO 1800

The national Synods of the established Reformed Church of the Netherlands in the sixteenth century made it

a requirement that ministerial and elder delegates at major assemblies be of equal number, and that congregations or Classes be represented equally at the broader assemblies, regardless of their size. Though considerable effort was made to carry these rules into effect, the success thereof was only partial. Frequently ministerial delegates outnumbered the elders. This was due sometimes to usurpation on the part of the ministers but more often this was due to the elders themselves who felt that they could not lose the time required. About the year 1700 ministerial delegates outnumbered the elders by a ratio of from two or three-to-one in three of the seven provincial Synods. Already at the national Synod of Dort, 1618-'19, the ratio had been two-to-one. And in two of the provincial Synods classical delegation was unequal and depended upon the size of the Classis.

In the provincial Synod of South Holland (which was the largest of the seven Synods, and typical of the others) seventeenth and eighteenth century history records the sad fact of ministers competing with one another for the privilege of being delegated to the provincial Synod and of having seats on its committees. Reasons for this ambition were the desire to get away from regular work, to be in the capital city for a few weeks, and to receive government pay. As far back as 1636 even politics were employed to affect the votes. The matter came up frequently and this led to the decision to keep it out of the Minutes, which practice was continued for a century. In 1768 the difficulty led to the rule to delegate ministers to Synod, and to place them on its committees, by rotation. This rule—which is bad church polity—was practiced till at least the first part of the nineteenth century.



## THE BROADEST ASSEMBLIES OF VARIOUS DENOMINATIONS

The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands which had their origin in 1834; their daughter denomination in America, the Christian Reformed Church; the Reformed Church in America; and Presbyterian Churches generally send to their major assemblies a number of elder delegates that is equal to the number of ministers. In the established Church of Scotland, however, and also in some of the (provincial) Synods of the established Netherlands Reformed Church, the ministerial delegates for more than two centuries already were twice the number of elder delegates in their major assemblies.

The number of delegates that are sent from a Classis to Synod is the same, regardless of size, in the case of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands and the Christian Reformed Church of this country. But generally in the Churches holding the presbyterial polity this is not the case. In the Reformed Church in America each Classis sends to the General Assembly one minister and one elder for every 3000 communicants. In the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. every Presbytery sends to the General Assembly one minister and one elder, called commissioners, for every twenty-four ministers in a Presbytery. In the Evangelical and Reformed Church the General Assembly is composed of at least one minister and a lay member from each of the Particular Synods, which, in addition, send a minister and a lay member for every 50 congregations and every 10,000 members. The General Assembly of the established Church of Scotland is also constituted by an unequal representation from the lesser assemblies. Such unequal delegation marks also the broadest assemblies of



the Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod of North America, The Methodist Church, and the Congregational-Christian Churches.

#### LAY DELEGATES IN ASSEMBLIES OF INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

Independent Churches send lay delegates to their major assemblies besides their pastors. This practice rests upon their view that authority belongs only to the local church as a body and only this body has the right to govern. Because their major assemblies can only advise, the independents naturally have no objection to delegating also lay members. Presbyterian polity holds that authority belongs not only to the local church as a body but also, and particularly, to the office bearers. Therefore this polity ascribes only to office bearers the right to administer the affairs of ecclesiastical government in the major councils.

#### DELEGATE THE VERY BEST TO MAJOR ASSEMBLIES

Upon the decisions before their broadest councils depends largely the future of the Churches holding the presbyterial polity. Because continuity in these assemblies is desirable, there ought to be a goodly number of delegates who were present at the previous assembly. (In the case of a provincial Synod of the Netherlands Reformed Church in the seventeenth century most all of the delegates were such as had been at a previous Synod.) The broadest assemblies are deliberative bodies and therefore those most capable of deliberating should be chosen. Those most familiar with questions of church polity and those having the most experience in assembly work should have a definite preference as the votes are cast. They who favor the rotary method of delegating, or they who incline to give a turn

to the greatest possible number, should consider that the broadest assemblies essentially are not schools for the instruction of the inexperienced, nor are they social centers for meeting old acquaintances, nor are they rubber-stamp gatherings wherein practically everything is done by the few men on the committees. These broadest assemblies are councils wherein the highest governmental interests of the Presbyterian and Reformed part of God's kingdom must be deliberated, and ability to deliberate on matters of church polity should be the first consideration in choosing the delegates to them. The lesser assembly, before electing them, should direct the attention of the voters to the importance of sending its most able and most consecrated men.

#### DELEGATES TO CLASSES OR PRESBYTERIES

When Reformed or Presbyterian Churches rule that all the ministers within the confines of the lesser assembly, including those without a fixed charge, have equal rights at the assembly, such Churches may upset the balance that is intended by the principle that ministerial and elder delegates should be present in equal number.

It is advisable to send the same elder to successive meetings of the Classis or Presbytery (as far as this can be done consistent with the principle of the equality of the elders) in order to enable the elder the better to take an intelligent part in the deliberations of the assembly.

In the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. the congregation is represented at the Presbytery only by an elder. The minister in said denomination is not a member of the local church he serves but he is a member of the Presbytery.

## THE FUNCTIONING OF MAJOR ASSEMBLIES

## THEIR EXECUTIVE, LEGISLATIVE, AND JUDICIAL FUNCTIONS

In the work of the major assemblies may be discerned three distinct functions—executive, legislative and judicial. Executive functions are those in which the regular proceedings of the several departments of church activity are supervised and promoted. Legislative functions are those in which rules are made for the administration of the various phases of church life, including discipline. And judicial functions are those in which an opinion is expressed on questions of discipline and other matters, brought to the major assemblies by the minor assemblies or by individuals.

## THEIR AUTHORITY WITH RESPECT TO THE LOCAL CHURCH

Major assemblies do not have power or authority that is distinctly different from the power that resides in the local church. Major assemblies are not, speaking technically, higher but broader assemblies. Their power or authority does not reside in themselves but is delegated to them by the local churches. These through their delegates bring their united power or authority together in the major assembly, and its authority is greater because it is the united authority of the local churches. It is an accumulated or cumulative authority which does not differ from the authority of the local church in quality but in quantity. The exercise of this cumulative authority is essential and beneficial to the good order and edification of the local churches as a whole. The united authority of the churches in the major assembly watches over and cares for the welfare of the churches together.

The word autonomous, as applied to the right of the local church to govern itself, is faulty for the members of a church may not do just as they please but are subject to the rule of their Lord and King. With this also independent Churches agree. Their emphasis on the autonomy of the local church is not with respect to Christ but with regard to the major assemblies. In presbyterian polity, however, the right of the major assembly to exercise authority over the local church is conceded. The use of the word autonomy with respect to the local church must therefore the more be a very restricted one in Reformed and Presbyterian Churches.

The autonomy of the local church has its limitations because of the agreement into which it enters with other churches to consider certain matters together and to abide by the combined judgment of the affiliated churches. The local church bestows upon the major assembly a part of its authority so that through the combined authority of all the churches the local church may be governed the better. And the judgments of the major assembly with respect to the matters of mutual interest or of mutual agreement the local church must of course respect .

The degree to which a local church is independent of or dependent on the major assembly is illustrated in the relation of the State to the federal government. The local church is autonomous or self governing in so far as the interests of the Church as a whole allow. But this autonomy of the local church is limited to the degree that the interests of the Church as a whole require.

#### THE DELEGATES NOT FETTERED IN THEIR VOTING

A delegate in his voting at a major assembly should

reckon with the wishes of the local church or the minor assembly on any pending matter since he represents the lesser body. However, in presbyterian polity the idea of representation does not imply that the delegate is fettered by the stand of the lesser body. That stand he should publicly state but he is free to vote as his conscience dictates. He should consider the opinions expressed by the representatives of all the churches assembled in the major assembly, and he should cast his vote in the light of all that he hears. And this is what the body that delegated him should want him to do. If all the delegates to major assemblies were fettered in their voting by the minor assemblies, the essential, deliberative character of the major gatherings would be destroyed, and they would be reduced to the level of mere voting machines.

#### MATTERS TO BE CONSIDERED

In ecclesiastical assemblies only matters that are ecclesiastical should be considered—not those which are chiefly social, political, or industrial. The Church of Jesus Christ should confine itself to its divinely imposed task, and do that well, and it will then have no time to spare for fields of endeavor not specifically its own.

The matters with which a major assembly ought mostly to be occupied are those which are referred to it by the subordinate assemblies, churches, committees, or individuals. However, a major assembly may consider a matter, common to all the churches, though it be not presented by a lesser body. If, for example, a church which is in danger of ruin neglects to bring its case to the major assembly, it is nevertheless proper for the latter to take the matter in hand.



In the case of very difficult questions, in the event that the Scriptures do not give either a plain or an implied answer, it is preferable that the major assembly take no definite stand and that it limit itself to the giving of fraternal advice. In doctrinal matters a decision should not be reached by way of a majority vote but by patiently seeking to bring all to agreement beforehand through judicious discussion and exhortation.

One of the questions that may arise at a major assembly is whether it should refer a matter back to the subordinate assemblies or churches. National Synods of the Netherlands Reformed Church in the sixteenth century, upon adopting a set of rules for the government of the churches, were wont to refer the matter back to the minor assemblies for ratification. Though this was not really necessary, it had value because the approval of the minor assemblies manifested the better the unity of the churches. Because a major assembly has only cumulative authority, it should be truly and fully representative before it passes a very important decision. If there be any doubt as to it being truly representative, the matter ought to be referred back to the subordinate assemblies or churches rather than that an important decision be passed that is without authoritative warrant.

Major assemblies should guard themselves against instituting or continuing cold, formal, and time-consuming procedures that lead the mind away from the plain and brief Scriptural mode of action, and which have a harmful effect upon piety and devotion to God.

In presbyterian polity committees or appointees of major assemblies have no authority in themselves, and they



may not exercise any authority which was not granted them. Their task is limited to that which was assigned them. And for the performance of that task they have no more authority than what was specifically granted them for the work assigned.

### THE PASSING OF DECISIONS

On the whole, legislation that is enacted by major ecclesiastical assemblies does not today enjoy the regard of the membership that is necessary for making it really effective. This disregard shows itself more frequently in indifference than in pronounced opposition. It is in no small part due to the fact that the human element is too patent in much of present day church legislation. The way to improve matters is to insist upon passing fewer rules and only such as have Scriptural warrant. When the laws that are passed contain a divine claim, it may be expected that the conscience will yield. It is an easy matter to pass a law but to pass a really effective one is a most difficult task. It is this harder course that the assemblies should choose. Only when assemblies pass laws that have divine authority and therefore bind the conscience, may they expect compliance. And when they pass such laws, they should insist upon obedience. The Westminster Confession requires such obedience, for concerning the decisions of major assemblies it declares that if they are "consonant to the Word of God, they are to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement with the Word but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God, appointed thereunto by His Word" (Article 36:3).

In Reformed Churches in the past it was customary to warn against the multiplication of rules. This was regarded

as tending to put the Church into fetters, to force the creeds into the background, and to lead the Church into formalism. The Reformed fathers believed that it was to the profit of the Church to make general regulations and to describe but few of the details, leaving the application of those general rules to the lesser assemblies.

Superseded decisions should not be lost sight of. These also should be kept before the people in order that they may sense the continuity of the Church. Often a former rule is better than the one which afterward took its place. The Spirit of God may indeed have guided the former assembly rather than the later gathering.

#### CASES OF APPEAL

A "protest" is made only by a member of a body against some action or decision of that body in order to free his conscience of responsibility, and it is entered upon the record of that body; and that ends the matter for it is not brought to the major assembly. The Reformed Church in America, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and other Churches also, use the word "protest" only in that way. For anything that is brought to a major assembly the most common word used is "appeal." The word "protest" is used regularly in the Christian Reformed Church where other Churches speak of an appeal or a grievance. Its loose and untechnical use of the word "protest" conflicts with the generally-accepted terminology.

An appeal should state what is the matter at issue, what is the decision from which appeal is made, and the reasons why one feels himself wronged by the decision.

There should be a time limit within which an appeal

may be made. The Christian Reformed Church has the usage, and the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands have the rule, that an appeal from a decision of an ecclesiastical assembly must be made before the first following meeting of the major assembly appealed to. The Reformed Church in America has ruled that notice of an appeal must be made within ten days from the time of the action from which an appeal is made, and that within ten days after the notice the appeal must be submitted in writing.

Major assemblies should not encourage members to abuse the privilege of appealing by taking seriously an appeal that deals with a very minor matter or which appears to originate more from a desire to justify oneself than from concern about the honor of God or the welfare of the Church.

On the other hand, major assemblies should not discourage members from making appeals when circumstances urge the need of them. This has been altogether too common. Ministers and elders are called upon to act the part of lawyers in ecclesiastical courts. But they do not receive the training of a lawyer; accordingly they have not on the whole a judicial habit of mind, and they are not skillful in legal proceedings. There has been so much miscarriage of justice in church trials that they fail to command respect, at least on the part of many of those who are judicially minded.

One of the serious errors of ecclesiastical assemblies, resulting in the miscarriage of justice, originates in the procedure of appointing committees for cases of appeal, instead of disposing of the matter as an assembly. When the committee appointed consists of even fewer persons

than the body that appeals or to which there is objection, the appeal in effect is not to a major assembly but to a minor one. When such a committee has rendered an opinion, that is for all practical purposes final, for from such committee's decision there is in the ecclesiastical procedure of at least some denominations no effective appeal. The procedure of appointing committees is advocated on the assumption that the cases are usually too involved for the whole assembly to consider. But committees also fail woefully to grasp involved cases. Why then intrust a case of appeal to a committee of a few persons when the Word of God says for our guidance that it is in the multitude of counselors that safety resides? Why not rather in delicate cases, at the time the major assembly meets, require a committee to present to the assembly what is the real issue? Let the committee be careful to say as little as possible what would unnecessarily harm the reputation of the parties at variance. The appointment of a committee to dispose of the case locally should not be the invariable rule. And when this procedure is followed, it should take place only on condition that both parties at variance are fully agreed to intrust their case to a committee, for an appellant has the right to require that his case be considered by the entire major assembly to which appeal is made.

If in appealing from a State Supreme Court to the United States Supreme Court the same persons in part would be seated in the higher court, then it would be of little use to make such appeal; especially, if the judges who sat in the State court would vocally do their utmost to win the other members of the federal court to agree with their decision. All this, which is a thing unheard of in civil courts, is the regular practice in the author's own denomi-

nation. For therein a committee, appointed for a case of appeal by a major assembly, sways the assembly to its point of view, against the useless protests of one or both of the parties at variance. Usually such grievances are not even presented, for the unsatisfied party knows beforehand the bias of the assembly in favor of its committee. The members of the assembly, moreover, are not judicially minded as are the members of the federal Supreme Court. The travesty on justice in the kind of ecclesiastical court under consideration is therefore even greater than in the supposed case of the civil court previously cited. The judicial question before any ecclesiastical assembly is not "who is right" but "what is right." Whether the "who" is a committee of any major assembly or the very assembly itself should make no difference.

All Churches having the presbyterial polity should adopt rules preventing interested persons from affecting the decision when a case is appealed. The Reformed Church in America rules that "neither accuser nor accused shall act as a member of the judicatory in any stage of a trial before it nor sit in judgment on the case." The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and other denominations also, have similar rules. Some also have the good rule, when an ecclesiastical assembly is to sit in a judicial capacity upon a case, to solemnly direct the attention of the assembly to that fact.

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## AN APPRAISAL OF MAJOR ASSEMBLIES

### CRITICISM OF AUTHORITATIVE MAJOR ASSEMBLIES

It is objected against presbyterial polity that there is



no Scriptural warrant for its system of authoritative major assemblies. It must be admitted that there is no command in Scripture requiring such a system. For that matter, there is no command either for having the advisory assemblies of the independents, so that this criticism, if made by them, is a two-edged sword that cuts both ways. Moreover, the absence of a command is not a conclusive argument against authoritative assemblies. If it were, then it would also be wrong to worship on Sunday or to permit women at the Lord's Table because there is no Scriptural command for these practices either.

It must be acknowledged that the churches of apostolic days were independent of one another, and that Scripture does not with even a word speak of a system of stated and authoritative major assemblies. The council of Jerusalem was a precedent for occasional but not for stated assemblies; a precedent for an assembly of both clerical and lay members but not for one of office bearers only; and a precedent for a meeting of the congregation with a few delegates of another church but not for an assembly of many churches each of them represented by only a few delegates. But, when all this is granted, it still remains true, as was shown previously, that the council of Jerusalem did make binding decisions and thereby set a precedent for authoritative assemblies. And that is the question at issue—the question at issue with only the adherents of independent polity.

That there was no system of authoritative major assemblies in the days of the apostles is not strange for there was then little need of them. For the apostles in their personal contacts and through their representatives and letters au-



thoritatively directed the churches toward an outward expression of their inner unity.

If against authoritative major assemblies it be objected that they sometimes make mistakes, a ready answer is at hand in the fact that it just naturally is human to err even when a number of specially-trained persons are assembled together. But this is even more true of the untrained members of the independent local church as they decide the issues before them without direction from that multitude in whom Solomon says there is safety.

Some of the Churches holding the presbyterial polity are sometimes justly criticized for having a set of rules that is altogether too elaborate. Some of them have rules so multitudinous and meticulous as to be a hindrance rather than a help to their best interests.

One of the earliest criticisms against major assemblies comes from Gregory Nazianzen, a bishop, who in the year 381 excused himself from attending a council to which he had been summoned by saying "that he was desirous of avoiding all Synods because he had never seen a good effect or happy conclusion of any one of them, that they rather increased than lessened the evils they were designed to prevent, and that the love of contention, and the lust of power, were there manifested in instances innumerable." The charge of Nazianzen was not unfounded for in the early centuries councils were despotic. The cause which contributed most to this despotism was the fact that those early councils were robbed of their popular and representative element when elders were deprived of their rightful place in them and when they had become assemblies of bishops only.

## THE VALUE OF MAJOR ASSEMBLIES

A series of governing assemblies, such as is a central feature of presbyterian polity, has several advantages. These assemblies are a protection for the members since they are courts of appeal wherein the differences that arise can be settled in a peaceful way, after careful investigation and ample discussion. These assemblies are a protection against heresy and disorder for they enable the Church to maintain unity of doctrine, discipline, and ritual. And these assemblies are an effective means whereby to promote the causes of missions, benevolence, and Christian education.

The system of authoritative major assemblies, which marks presbyterian polity, constitutes a form of ecclesiastical government that is well balanced. It avoids extremes. On the one hand, it avoids the uncertainty of a pure democracy, as in independent polity; while, on the other hand, it avoids the despotism of the clergy, as in episcopal polity. It is a form of government that is neither too widely diffused nor too narrowly concentrated.

All assemblies in the Christian Church have value in that they stand committed to the principle of unity. However much the views within the assembly meeting may clash, nevertheless, when the council speaks to those without, it speaks with a single voice to unify the churches as well as to guide and to govern them. This is true of the Consistory or Session as well as of the major assemblies in presbyterian polity, and it is true also of the assemblies of the independents. If the assembly is advisory, it speaks to those without to the intent that all shall follow its advice; and if it be authoritative, it speaks to those without to the intent that all shall observe its laws.



## CHAPTER SIX

# MINISTERS

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The emergence of the ministerial office out of the eldership of the primitive Church was explained in Chapter One, under "The Development of the Episcopate," and particularly in that part entitled "The Emergence of the Bishop above the Elder."

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### THE PREPARATION FOR THE MINISTRY

There are approximately 260 theological seminaries in the United States. This figure does not include the Roman Catholic seminaries numbering less than 50 students. And there are an even greater number of denominational colleges and universities.

In the Reformed Church in America a three-fourths vote is required of the members present in a General Assembly to appoint a seminary professor. In the Christian Reformed Church a simple majority is sufficient to elect. In the latter Church a professor in theology is appointed first for a term of two years; then, in case of reappointment, for a term of six years; and finally, if again reappointed, for an indefinite term.

In the Christian Reformed Church it is customary to give financial assistance to those who desire to be trained for the ministry if they have not sufficient means of their own.

In the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands seminary students are strictly prohibited from conducting services in the churches. This is not allowed even in the established Reformed Church of the Netherlands. In the Christian Reformed Church of this country and in the Reformed Church in America this however is permitted.

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## THE EXAMINATION OF CANDIDATES

### QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED IN THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

The primitive Church required of a candidate for the ministry the following qualifications: a mature age; freedom from worldly cares so as to enable him to devote himself completely to the office—since the primitive pastor received no stated salary and received only necessary support out of the regular poor fund; a holy life; and ability to teach, of which proof had first to be given in the discharge of inferior offices.

### THE PREPARATORY EXAMINATION

A number of Churches require that a graduate of a theological seminary be examined on two different occasions before he is admitted into the ministry: the first, if successful, making him subject to a call by the churches; and the second, after the acceptance of a call, permitting him to be ordained. The former is preparatory and the latter is final or decisive.

The established Reformed Church of the Netherlands about the year 1700 required in the preparatory inquiry: a presentation of credentials; an examination in Greek,

Hebrew, and important doctrines; and evidence of ability to speak and to preach. In the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, which separated from the established Church in 1834, the preparatory inquiry today requires the presentation of credentials, an examination in dogmatics, a sermon on a designated text for which a week's time is given, and exegesis on a designated chapter in both the Old and New Testaments, following the original language, for which at least two weeks time is given. The preparatory examination of the Christian Reformed Church in this country covers the following: dogmatics, personal attitude to the ministry, and a sermon. The examination of the Reformed Church in America, which must be taken to obtain licensure to preach, covers Hebrew and Greek, exegesis, biblical introduction, church history, methods of sermonizing, dogmatics; and personal attitude toward religion, the ministry, and the Confessions. The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. requires a short thesis on a theological subject, an exposition of several Scripture verses, and a sermon.

The preparatory examination in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, previous to 1896, was conducted by the Board of Trustees of the theological school at Kampen; but since then, due to the presence of the Free University at Amsterdam, this examination is conducted in the Classis whereof the theological graduate is a member. The Reformed Church in America and the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. also cause this examination to take place in the Classis or Presbytery. The Christian Reformed Church, which conducted a preparatory examination only since 1922, had this conducted by the Board of Trustees of its theological school till 1937; and since the latter date by the Synod. In this the Christian Reformed Church now is in



agreement with the Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod of North America.

#### SUBSCRIPTION TO THE STANDARDS

The Reformed Church in America has the correct rule that requires the signing of the Formula of Subscription at the time when the theological student is first granted licensure to conduct religious services. It requires this signature again upon the final examination and preceding the ordination. In the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands this is required upon graduation and after the preparatory examination, when the right to preach is granted for the first time. In the Christian Reformed Church of this country it is not the rule but the usage to require the signing of the Formula of Subscription after the final examination which precedes the ordination.

The established Reformed Church of the Netherlands since 1816 has not required subscription to the three Reformed Standards. Beginning with that year its ministers had merely to say that they "sincerely accept and heartily believe the doctrine which in accordance with the Holy Word of God is contained in the accepted three Formulas of Unity." And since 1883 still less is required, for its ministers promise only "according to ability to promote the interests of the kingdom of God, and in accordance with these, the interests of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands, including submission to its regulations."

#### THE FINAL EXAMINATION

In most Churches a candidate upon the acceptance of a call must pass an examination previous to ordination. This inquiry, in the case of Churches requiring two exami-

nations, is final or decisive as compared with the previous inquiry which is preparatory. In Churches holding the presbyterial polity it takes place in the Classis or Presbytery wherein the candidate is to begin his ministerial labors.

In the established Reformed Church of the Netherlands, about the year 1700, this final examination consisted in a presentation of a certificate showing that the preparatory examination was passed, a testimonial as to the behavior since the earlier examination, still further investigation as to the ability to preach and as to the applicant's theology, and especially an inquiry as to his personal attitude toward the ministry. In the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands the final examination must take at least three hours, and it covers the presentation of credentials, Bible, dogmatics, ecumenical and Reformed Standards, church history, ethics, church polity, practical theology; the exegesis of two designated chapters in the Old Testament and two in the New Testament, following the original, for which three weeks time is given; and the preaching of a sermon on a text of the applicant's choice. The final examination in the Christian Reformed Church of this country covers dogmatics, Standards, Bible, church polity, church history, ethics, preaching, and personal attitude to the ministry. At this examination three representatives from three neighboring Classes must be present; and these delegates as well as the Classis itself must agree to the admittance of the applicant if the ordination is to proceed. In the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. the final examination consists of an inquiry as to the knowledge of experimental religion, philosophy, theology, church history, Greek and Hebrew, church polity, and—as the Presbytery may elect—other subjects and evidence of preaching ability.

## THE ORDINATION OF MINISTERS

## DIVERGING VIEWS AS TO THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ORDINATION

The adherents of episcopal polity over-emphasize the significance of ordination. The Roman Catholic Church says "that ordination confers grace, that it imprints a character, which can neither be blotted out nor taken away; and that priests, after they have been rightly ordained, cannot again become laymen." The established Church of England does not make of ordination a sacrament as does Rome but it agrees with Rome to a considerable extent. Both ascribe to the Church the power of communicating the Holy Spirit to the ordained so that supernatural grace and power are conveyed, enabling him to administer the Word and the sacraments. Both ascribe to the Church the power to confer the office of the priesthood.

Adherents of independent polity, on the other hand, under-emphasize the importance of ordination. They say that when the people have called one to be their minister, such a person has the full title to act as soon as he has accepted the call, and that a church need not necessarily make use of the ceremony of ordination. When, however, it is employed, this is to be regarded simply as an act of the members and office bearers together asking God for a blessing upon the office, which was already conferred previously by the vote of the people.

## THE MEANING OF ORDINATION AND IMPOSITION

Ordination is the rite by means of which a person is formally introduced into a sacred office. It is not customary to speak of being ordained to an office after the person

for some time already has been performing the functions thereof. Ordination is a public rite in which the Church declares that upon the one ordained God has himself conferred the office by His previous call, that the person has the needed talents and training, and that the people must acknowledge these things by their respect for him and by their submission to him.

The laying on of hands in the primitive Church signified the setting apart for a sacred office, and it was moreover a symbolic sign of the bestowal of the office. Later it came to be viewed as a sacrament and as actually conferring grace. However, in the imposition of hands as such no gift or grace is conferred. The blessing that is prayed for, and which may indeed be received, is not due to the laying on of hands but to the sovereign operation of the Holy Spirit. Imposition of hands is not essential to ordination as may be seen in the fact that it was not employed in the case of Jesus and the apostles who however were indeed ordained. Ordination would not be void without imposition for the latter is only the ritual part of the former. From this it does not follow that the laying on of hands is but an empty form. For one thing, it is necessary because of apostolic example and precept. But, more than this, the imposition of hands is the last and crowning act by which the aforesaid meaning of ordination is openly declared.

#### WHERE AND BY WHOM DENOMINATIONS ORDAIN

In the Reformed Church in America ordination is effected by the Classis that conducts the final examination of the candidate. In the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. it takes place in the Presbytery, which is equivalent to a

Classis. In the Orthodox Presbyterian Church it takes place in the congregation but with the Presbytery present. In the Christian Reformed Church it also takes place in the congregation but without a specific rule requiring the presence of even a representative of the Classis.

In the Baptist denomination a standing committee of ministers within a District Association, which committee is called a Council, upon examination of the candidate, recommends him to the church for ordination. That is the form of the matter but in practice the right of ordination rests really with the Council. In Congregational-Christian Churches ordination used to be effected by the local church but now it is done by a Council.

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## THE CALLING OF MINISTERS

### THE DIFFICULTY AS TO PASTORAL SETTLEMENT

The task of uniting a pastor and a congregation into a harmonious whole, and of continuing such a relationship, is in all denominations considered to be one of the most difficult. In presbyterially-governed Churches the task of bringing the pastor and the congregation together is much more difficult than in denominations that are episcopally-governed. In the latter they have less success in maintaining a favorable pastoral relationship but this weakness is mitigated by the ease with which the pastoral connection is again dissolved.

### METHODS OF CALLING IN VARIOUS DENOMINATIONS

The Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S., a daughter denomination of the established Church of England,



intrusts the calling of a minister to the vestry of a congregation. This vestry, which ordinarily is occupied with temporal affairs, in the event of a vacancy, chooses a rector—usually after consultation with the bishop of the diocese. To the bishop however is left little more than the formal service of installation.

The Methodist Church invests in its bishops the power of stationing preachers. This Church also proceeded from the Church of England but departed further from the episcopal form of government than the Protestant Episcopal Church. However, in its practice of stationing pastors The Methodist Church is still episcopal but the Protestant Episcopal Church is not.

In the independently-governed Congregational-Christian churches, when there is a vacancy, the appointment of a large committee is recommended. This committee, which represents all the organizations in the local church, in turn elects a small committee from its own number to do the actual work involved and to report back. This committee is advised to seek the suggestions of the State superintendent.

Several of the largest denominations, that are governed according to presbyterial polity, have in each of their Presbyteries or Classes a committee on pastoral settlement to which a minister or congregation, desirous of a change, must or can apply. In such denominations as the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., the United Church of Canada, the Evangelical and Reformed Church, (and large Lutheran groups also), a vacant church may not call a minister who has not first been considered and approved by a superior official or committee. In large Presbyterian denominations



the Session (which is equivalent to a Consistory) of a vacant church may not meet at any time except in the presence of another minister of the Presbytery.

In the Christian Reformed Church there is no centralized direction in the calling of ministers. The rules of the Church call for a counselor who represents the Classis in the matter but his authority is limited to preventing the infraction of a few rules such as that the ministers considered must be at least two years in their charge. The counsel of the counselor is almost never desired and he cannot impose it. The Consistory, composed of both elders and deacons, without outside direction makes a nomination of three ministers from which trio the congregation selects one. In other denominations the congregation votes on only one name at a time, and they consider it unwise to divide the congregation by submitting more than one name. A unique feature of the Christian Reformed Church is that it publishes in its church periodicals all the trios, calls, and declinations, as well as the acceptances of calls. This practice has the effect of focussing the attention of the vacant churches on those whose names appear in the church weeklies and of their neglecting to consider those whose names do not thus appear. It is one important reason why the problem of long pastorates afflicts this denomination to the extent that more than one-third of its ministers now serve from 10 to 34 years in a charge.

#### THE PROBLEM OF LONG PASTORATES

Rather generally in presbyterially-governed Churches there is a problem created by the fact that some ministers almost never receive a call. Pastorates, that are long volun-

tarily, are frequently beneficial for both the minister and the congregation. However, when pastorates are long simply for want of a call, they as a rule have great disadvantages. They usually place a severe strain upon the congregation, and especially upon the minister.

The key to the solution of this problem in presbyterially-governed Churches rests especially with the calling churches. Of these there must be a goodly number for there naturally can be no movement of pastors if all the churches have a minister. And the vacant churches should call those ministers who served longest in their charges.

Upon becoming vacant a church should have its attention directed to ideals in the matter of calling—including the obligation of Consistories or Sessions toward one another of relieving those most burdened by long pastorates. In this matter also the golden rule of our Lord applies. A vacant church should consider that the problem of long pastorates is brought upon the Church by the failure of vacant churches to observe the golden rule, that the vacant church may itself in the future have to suffer due to this failure, that it is up to the vacant churches to solve this problem if it exists, that the vacant church will not necessarily suffer by calling ministers longest in their charges, that such ministers are not inferior as a group to the others, that they have given proof of their ability to hold out, and that the whole Church will profit if the vacant churches will cooperate toward the equalizing and shortening of pastorates.

In each Classis or Presbytery there should be a counselor for vacant churches who is one of its most experienced, competent, and trustworthy ministers; and he should

serve for a considerable time. He should be present when the nomination is made as well as at the election of a minister. He should be required to direct his efforts almost exclusively toward preventing or solving the problem of long pastorates, and to report about his work to the Classis or Presbytery. And the vacant church should feel morally obliged to reckon with the counsel of the counselor.

Another method of solving the difficult problem of long pastorates is one that contains features of the insurance system. It could be carried out by one or more interested persons, even apart from the previous suggestion about a counselor; and, if desired, even without the sanction of the broader assemblies. Simply stated, it would work out as follows: upon becoming vacant, a church, according to previous arrangement, extends its calls to ministers who have served longest in their charges, selecting them from a submitted list; and the reward of such a church would consist in this that after a few years its minister would also be placed upon the list submitted to each of the vacant churches that are united with the plan. This plan would likely tend to draw almost all churches into it for the churches would suffer if they failed to do so, and the sacrifice required would be negligible as compared to the benefit received.

#### SUGGESTIONS AS TO CALLING

Vacant churches should give preference to ministers longest in their charges (except they be unwilling to move) as suggested previously.

They should highly value experience. Because much of a minister's work can be preserved, he naturally becomes

better with the passing years, provided that he continues to be faithful in his work. To him, because of this opportunity to store up the results of his labors, experience is a far greater asset than to most persons otherwise employed. The matured minister, if diligent, is a better preacher and pastor, a more efficient teacher, and a more judicious leader than a youthful one. The sad fact, that the larger churches frequently do not reckon with this, takes from the ministry an important incentive to faithful and continued effort, and it deprives those larger churches of the ablest ministry.

Vacant churches should be careful not to carry over into the Church the evaluations of the world by giving undue emphasis to superficial qualifications such as popularity, oratorical ability, youth, and physical appearance. They should seek rather for such qualities as unselfish zeal, devotion, studiousness, thoroughness, sincerity, and spiritual force. They should consider how earnest the minister is in calling on families, how effective he is as a catechism teacher, how well he can guide in the meetings of the church, and whether in his contacts with others his influence is on the whole edifying.

Vacant churches should not avoid a minister for the mere reason that he has had some difficulty in a charge. They who want a pastor, who everywhere is everybody's friend, want one of whom Jesus said "woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you! for in the same manner did their fathers to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26). It may very well be to the credit of a minister that he has had difficulty. Jesus did also, and so did the apostles; ministers who had difficulties may therefore very well be in good company. There are faults and weaknesses in every con-

gregation. The minister who has the courage to try to improve a congregation, perhaps with little support from influential members, and who in that way gets into difficulty, should be appreciated by the churches. If calling churches avoid such ministers, this discourages the faithful exercise of discipline and results in damage to the kingdom of God.

Vacant churches should consider that, when ministers are in a strange pulpit or when they meet people, they do not all succeed equally well in making good first impressions but that later impressions do not always agree with the first ones. Some of the finest ministers are among those whose first contacts do not particularly recommend them. And as to a slight peculiarity, it should be borne in mind that a congregation soon gets accustomed to it and fails to notice it.

Vacant churches should try to avoid trial-preaching. It cheapens the Gospel; and the ministry; and the Church! The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, etc., refuses to resort to trial-preaching, and on that point it is possibly almost a lone beacon, showing other Churches what is the right way. Churches can very well get along without trial-preaching by means of having others occupy the pulpit frequently when there is a minister in residence, by alertness in remembering such visiting pastors, and by greater trust in and submission to the providence of God in the matter of calling. If a vacant church, nevertheless, employs trial-preaching, it should invite only such minister as it is particularly interested in. For if it fails to seriously consider a minister who has occupied its pulpit, it thereby exposes him to criticism in his own church; and needless



exposure of a minister to such criticism is an injustice to him.

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## MINISTERS FROM OTHER DENOMINATIONS

### AS TO PERMITTING THEM IN THE PULPIT ON OCCASION

Neither the established Church of England nor its daughter denomination, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S., permit ministers of other denominations in their pulpits. This strictness is based upon their doctrine of apostolic succession. This doctrine is not held by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, etc., but this denomination is fully as exclusive as said episcopal Churches, for the Missouri Synod does not have pulpit fellowship even with other Lutherans. In contrast to these Churches, most denominations are rather lenient as to permitting other ministers to occupy their pulpits. The Christian Reformed Church permits this only in the case of other ministers who in doctrine and church government, and with respect to secret societies, agree with it and are definitely Reformed.

It is important for the very existence of a denomination that it maintain control over its pulpits. If, for instance, a man, whom the Church could not see *its way clear to ordain*, were not prevented from filling the pulpit of some vacant congregation interested in him, such a preacher could very well gain the support of said church to the extent that the denomination would be forced either to ordain the man or to see the congregation break away from the Church.

## AS TO RECEIVING THEM PERMANENTLY AS MINISTERS

The established Church of England, and no doubt also the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S., ordain anew any minister who joins them who did not receive an episcopal ordination previously. Though the Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod of North America does not belong to the strictest group of Lutherans, it also requires re-ordination of ministers who come to it from other denominations. It does this because ordination is not a sacrament and because of the difficulty in determining whether the previous ordination was valid. It is not surprising that a denomination such as the Congregational-Christian Churches requires no re-ordination if there be somewhat reason to have confidence in the other denomination. However, also such Churches as the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., the Reformed Church in America, and even the Christian Reformed Church, require no re-ordination. A minister who enters the Reformed Church in America, from a Church that maintains doctrines that differ with the content of its Standards, must with a complete and explicit declaration renounce such doctrines in writing. In the Evangelical and Reformed Church a minister from another denomination, upon examination, is first received provisionally for a year before he can obtain a permanent ministerial status.

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MATTERS PERTAINING TO THE WORK OF  
MINISTERS

## MINISTERS IN OFFICE FOR LIFE

There are several denominations such as the Christian

Reformed Church which believe that ministers should hold office for life though they do not take this position in the case of elders and deacons. This is not because they think there is a fundamental distinction in the essential character of these offices but because it is thought to be more profitable to the Church that ministers serve their whole life and that the others serve but for a limited time. To the support of a life tenure for the ministry it may be urged that for this office there is required "all our love, John 21:15-17, II Cor. 5:14; all our time, John 9:4; all our willingness to serve, Luke 9:62, I Cor. 9:16, 17; all our endurance, II Tim. 4:1-5, 10; and our whole separation unto and devotion to this work, Rom. 1:1, Acts 15:26."

#### THE EQUALITY OF MINISTERS

Over against episcopal polity both bresbyterial and independent polity maintain the equality of the ministry. That this is very clearly the teaching of Jesus himself is evident from the following passages of Scripture. "Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Not so shall it be among you: but whosoever would become great among you, shall be your minister; and whosoever would be first among you, shall be your servant" (Matt. 20:25-27). "But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your teacher, and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father on the earth: for one is your Father, even he who is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your master, even the Christ" (Matt. 23:8-10). "And there arose also a contention among them, which of them was accounted to be greatest. And he said unto them, the kings of the Gentiles have lordship over them; and they that have authority over

them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve" (Luke 22:24-26).

#### TO GET YOUNG MINISTERS OFF TO A GOOD START

In the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, etc., it is required that young clergymen send written copies of all sermons preached the first two years to be scanned by the authorities at St. Louis, Missouri. However difficult it may be to introduce such a practice in other denominations, the value of such a rule ought to be admitted. The habits of a minister are largely determined during his first two years in office. Any requirement that will tend to improve his habits during the first years will have lasting benefit for the rest of his ministry.

#### A LIBRARY TO SUPPLEMENT THAT OF THE MINISTER

In many churches, particularly those which are not the largest and not located near populous centers, a minister is handicapped for want of an adequate library. If in such a church efforts were directed toward building up a fairly large library to remain with the church, this would not only benefit the pastor but also and especially the church, and that for years to come. Donations for such a purpose would be among the most judicious gifts that members and organizations within a church could make. To the pastor in office should be intrusted the choice of the books to be added during his pastorate, and this subject to only two provisions: that he purchase books other than those which are commonly found in the libraries of the ministers

of the denomination, and that he purchase only books that contribute specifically to the improvement of a minister's work. It ought not to be regarded as an offence to the pastor that the books be stamped as belonging to the congregation and that the clerk have a list of the titles. Such precaution is necessary since there seems to be a singular callousness to the eighth commandment on the part of some people when it comes to property in the form of books.

### A FLEXIBLE SALARY

A flexible salary, to be raised or lowered automatically with better or poorer times, would do away with a common source of grievance in many a church. It would seem to be possible for laymen of good business experience to make such graded scales to cover both urban and rural conditions. It should then be left to the local churches whether they wish to adopt such scale and to determine at what point in the scale they wish to link themselves.

### SECULAR VOCATIONS

A minister may be said to have entered upon a secular vocation if his secular activities are his first consideration and prevent him from doing justice to his ministerial work; or when his main work is not of a spiritual character, nor closely related to his calling to preach the Gospel, nor in the interest of the churches in general.

In the Christian Reformed Church a minister may not enter upon a secular vocation except for such weighty reasons as may receive the approval of the Classis.

### WHEN A MINISTER EXCHANGES PASTORATES

In order to move from one congregation to the other in



the Christian Reformed Church, it is necessary that a standing committee, of the Classis to which a minister belongs, approve of such an exchange; and that a similar committee, of the Classis to which he is to go, approve this also. In the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands such approval of a minister's credentials is not the work of a classical committee. Instead, in those Churches it is the rule that two neighboring churches of the calling church notify all the churches of the Classis of the time when the question of approval will be considered. Usually the other churches do not send delegates and the approving is done by said two neighboring churches. This method, though it involves more work, is a safer method. In the Reformed Church in America it is also a rule that the approval of a call is the work of Classis.

#### SLANDERING A MINISTER

The law of the country in practice stands most ready to protect a professional man. Charges which would not persuade a court that damage was done in the case of other persons, will frequently in the case of professional men be presumed to have caused damage. Untrue criticisms, which deprive a minister of the respect and confidence without which he can have no audience, subject the slanderer to suit for libel. A minister's dependence on the favorable attitude of the people is even greater than in the case of other professions. Accordingly the courts in numerous instances have upheld ministers in the case of false charges of adultery, theft, or other vice, without even requiring that definite proof of damage be given.

#### DISMISSAL OF A MINISTER

In Presbyterian Churches the Session may not initiate

steps toward dismissing a minister from office. This authority is delegated to the Presbytery to whom the Session may appeal to begin such process. This policy has much to commend it.

A minister should not be released because of a strained relation between himself and the Consistory or the congregation if the latter are largely the fault thereof and desire his removal without good reason. To dismiss a minister without good reason is sin before God, is a dishonor to the Church, and may lead to grave consequences. In any strained relation that originated in a minister's attempt to bring about improvement in the congregation, the minister should be favored. Usually in church quarrels it is the minister who is sacrificed if a choice must be made. But that is definitely a bad policy when it is followed regardless of what the history of the matter was. In that way the hand of the reforming minister is weakened and the faithful exercise of discipline discouraged by the very bodies who should insist upon the exercise thereof.

#### THE DEPOSITION AND RESTORATION OF A MINISTER

The Reformed Church in America rules that I Tim. 5:19 requires two or three witnesses to admit an accusation against a minister or elder. The witnesses intended in this passage are not merely witnesses in whose presence the accusation must be made but witnesses who are able to substantiate the accusation.

In the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands and in the Christian Reformed Church of this country the deposition of a minister is subject to the judgment of the Classis

which may not act except with the approval of appointed representatives of neighboring Classes.

In the Christian Reformed Church the reinstatement of a minister must be effected as a rule by the same Classis that deposed him. In the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands such reinstatement may not take place except with the approval of the Particular Synod. The Christian Reformed Church has no rule requiring even the presence of the aforesaid representatives of the neighboring Classes.

Penitence, even deep sorrow, does not in itself qualify a deposed minister to be restored. The sentiments of the religious public should also be definitely in his favor if this take place. In the case of restoration to office the Reformed Church in America requires reordination.

#### RETIREMENT OF MINISTERS AND THEIR SUPPORT

The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands have the rule that in event a minister desires to retire because of illness, his physical unfitness must be declared in writing by two doctors, one of whom is selected by the minister and the other by the Consistory. In the event of disagreement between the two, the Classis may appoint a third doctor to break the tie.

In the same Reformed Churches of the Netherlands an emeritus minister is not cared for by the churches as a whole but by the last church he served. The said Reformed Churches hold that it is not correct to *require* that all the churches together care for emeriti ministers. Preference by them is given to the word "care" rather than "pension." A church that is burdened by such care of an

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emeritus minister may ask for assistance from other churches, and such assistance is given; however, it is voluntary. Most denominations correctly regard the support of emeriti ministers as the responsibility of the churches as a whole.





## CHAPTER SEVEN

# DEACONS

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### ORIGIN AND NEED OF DEACONS

#### THE ORIGIN OF THE DEACON'S OFFICE

The origin and institution of the deacon's office is related in Acts 6:1-6. When the apostles, because of the growth of the church at Jerusalem, could not properly care for the poor, they said to the multitude "it is not fit that we should forsake the word of God and serve tables. Look out therefore, brethren, from among you seven men . . . whom we may appoint over this business. But we will continue stedfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the word." The office was therefore instituted specifically for the care of the poor, and in order that they who ministered in the Word might give themselves wholly to that work. Preaching therefore does not as such belong to the deacon's work. However, Stephen and Philip, two of the appointed deacons, either in their capacity as deacons or as evangelists, proclaimed the Gospel and even baptized. Therefore the confinement of the deacon's task to material concerns ought not to be stressed unduly.

#### THE NEED OF THE DEACON'S OFFICE

Although Presbyterian churches in the time of the Reformation at first had deacons, this office was not retained by them. When the government of Scotland supported or

strictly determined the support of the Church of Scotland, financial matters required less attention and consequently the deaconry in many congregations was no longer continued. This neglect of that office marked also the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. which had its origin in the established Church of Scotland. About 1830 this denomination had almost no congregations in which the office was retained as to both its name and task, though there were some in which the elders were called deacons or wherein deacons did work which was not originally assigned to their office. This neglect of the office marked other Presbyterian Churches no doubt as well. Today, however, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. has deacons, and this is true also of Presbyterian churches in Scotland. As in the case of elders, so also deacons are ordained for life in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.; but in most of the churches they serve for only a few years and are subject to re-election. They retain their office even though they are not continued in service.

In Reformed Churches generally the office of deacon ever since the Reformation has been maintained, and in these Churches the deacon's task concerns the care of the poor and the material welfare of the congregation—as in the case of the churches at the time of the apostles.

In the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands it was advised in 1893 that the finances be intrusted to persons who were not members of the Consistory but who ought to be chosen and dismissed by it. In the Christian Reformed Church of this country the Consistory members, which in practice include the deacons, are the trustees. In most of its churches the treasurer of the church funds is a deacon.

In the Presbyterian churches of Scotland deacons collect and distribute the church funds for ministerial support, for the material maintenance of the churches, and for missions. The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. in its Form of Government states that to the deacons may properly be committed the management of the temporal affairs of the church. In most Presbyterian Churches the temporalities are in charge of persons known as trustees who are not members of the Session—persons therefore other than the elders.

The question whether there still is need of the office of deacon should be viewed from the standpoint of whether there are poor because it was for their care that the office was instituted in the first place. Since it is the common practice today that civil authorities care for the poor, the question of the need of the deaconry should be considered also with that in view. It ought to be borne in mind that the State cannot manifest mercy as such for it can give only what it takes from others by compulsion in the form of taxes. Nor can the State bring about those edifying and educational influences upon the poor as the deacons can when they bring their material support. From these points of view it is better therefore that the churches provide for their poor. Whether the deacons with State aid would provide adequately for all the poor of the community must be answered in the negative upon the basis of the history of the matter in the Netherlands. For in that country, about the year 1900, the State forbade local government officials from aiding the poor except proof be given to them that the poor in question could not obtain aid through the agencies of the Church. Because the deaconries failed to care for the poor adequately, the State was compelled to

support those in want and the law of the State fell into disuse.

Whether there still is need for the deaconry ought to be viewed also from the standpoint of whether the elders are so burdened with spiritual concerns that they cannot adequately care for the poor. For it was this circumstance, that the apostles were over-burdened with the spiritual care of the flock, which originally occasioned the institution of the deacon's office. Previously the apostles had also taken care of the poor, and if it was proper for them to do so, it certainly is proper also for elders. The elders therefore ought to be so occupied with the spiritual care of the congregation that they have no time for its material concerns if they are to be justified in insisting upon the need of the deaconry.

In some denominations, as in the case of the Christian Reformed Church, it is the common practice to have in each congregation an equal number of deacons and elders. It is difficult to find any good basis for this practice, except the elders be over-burdened with the spiritual care of the flock and also that the material care of the flock requires a number of deacons equal to that of the elders. Since the problem of the deacon's place in the Consistory and his participation in the functions of the elder may not be lightly brushed aside, and since a Consistory is necessarily weakened if one half of its membership cannot properly take part in much of its work, serious thought ought to be given to the question whether the number of deacons in a church should not be reduced to a minimum and made considerably smaller than the number of elders. The twelve apostles in the church at Jerusalem did not recom-

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mend the election of twelve deacons but only seven. Moreover, the task of the Church in caring for the poor today is proportionately far smaller than it was in the time of the apostles, so that the ratio of deacons to elders need not be even as close as it was in their day. In any event, Churches should not maintain an equality in the number of deacons and elders if this practice be based merely on tradition, and particularly not if the deacons are in practice members of the Consistory.

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## THE DUTIES OF DEACONS

### TO WHOM THE CARE OF THE POOR BELONGS

The obligation to care for their poor rests first of all upon the relatives (I Tim. 5:4, 16); and then, upon the Church. It is a part of the task of deacons to direct the attention of the relatives to their duty. Deacons should attend to it, however, that those in need do not become the victims of the neglect of their relatives. The extent to which aid should be given is to be determined by the need, and not by the amount in the benevolent fund. If funds are insufficient, deacons should appeal for greater benevolent offerings. How much is to be given should be determined by the deacons jointly, and not individually. The Church should provide entirely for its own poor if at all possible. However, from this it does not follow that members must refuse all help that is offered by the State. As taxpayers they may be said to have a right to State aid, as well as others have this right.

### WHEN DEACONS VISIT THE POOR

In order to present to the poor the needed aid, deacons



should call at their homes. They should concern themselves with the reasons for the poverty. If the poverty be the fault of the poor, the deacons should in kindness bring this to their attention, and they should suggest in what way improvement in conditions may be attained. They should speak of the need of prayer in connection with daily labor, and they should suggest whether there may be a reason why they do not receive enough from Him who taught us to pray for our daily bread. If the poor do not make a proper use of the money given them, they should be given assistance in the form of provisions, such as groceries, fuel, rent, and medical care. It belongs to the task of deacons, when they call, to converse spiritually and to add a consoling word.

#### POOR WHO HAVE SOME PROPERTY

In the case of the aged poor who have some property, deacons should not require that they first sell it and live on the proceeds. But neither may such poor expect that the deacons provide for them if all the proceeds of their property be given to their relatives upon their decease. An arrangement should be effected in writing whereby it is agreed that the aid extended by the deacons be first subtracted from such proceeds.

#### ASSISTANCE FOR OUTSIDERS

If funds permit, deacons should not hesitate to assist the needy who are not members of a Church. Reformed Churches have done this in the past; particularly, in hard times. And this is in accordance with Scripture which says "as we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men; especially, unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10).

## WHETHER DEACONS SHOULD ASSIST IN ELDERS' WORK

At the time of the Reformation the Swiss churches that were under the influence of Calvin did not permit deacons to be members of the Consistory. In the early Reformed churches of both France and Scotland deacons however were members of the Consistory or Session, and they took part with the elders in the supervision and discipline of the church. In the Netherlands refugee church in London, which was ministered unto by a' Lasco, deacons took part in the work of elders only upon invitation.

In the Presbyterian churches of Scotland the participation of the deacons in the work of the elders continued for but a few years, beginning with 1560. Already in 1581 they were excluded from the church Session, and up to the present time this is no doubt the prevailing practice in Presbyterian Churches. In the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., for example, deacons even today may not take part in the meetings of the Session.

In the Reformed Church in America deacons meet with the elders in the Consistory but they have no voice in admitting members to full communion, in dismissing them to other churches, and in matters of discipline.

In the basic rules of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, and of its daughter denomination, the Christian Reformed Church of this country, the minister and the elders compose the Consistory. However these Churches, by way of exception, state that "wherever the number of elders is small, the deacons may be added to the Consistory by local regulation." The Christian Reformed Church has the rule that deacons in the Consistory may perform

the work of elders, including the right to vote in matters of church government. In actual practice the deacons in said Church take a fairly large share in the regular work of the Consistory, and have more influence than in Presbyterian and Reformed Churches generally.

Reformed denominations, having the Belgic Confession as one of their Standards, cannot consistently deprive deacons from a place in the Consistory and from taking part in its work since Article 30 of said Standard speaks of "elders and deacons who together with the pastors form the council of the church."

The work of a church council includes, besides the supervisory and disciplinary tasks of the elders, also duties of a broader character, such as financial matters, the calling of a pastor, the making of nominations, and the making of rules and regulations. From participation in such work the deacons cannot very well be deprived, but there is warrant for denying to them the right of doing work which belongs specifically to the task of elders.

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## DEACONS IN EPISCOPAL AND INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

### THEIR DUTIES IN EPISCOPAL CHURCHES

The Roman Catholic Church has declared that it belongs to a deacon's work "to accompany the bishop here and there, to attend upon him while preaching, to announce to him the names of catechumens and of candidates for Holy Orders, and to report to him those within his diocese who are living unholy lives. He is also to read the

Gospel and otherwise assist at the mass. And in the absence of the bishop he may expound the Gospel, though this is not regarded as one of his ordinary functions."

In the established Church of England and in the Protestant Episcopal Church of this country deacons are allowed to baptize, to perform the marriage ceremony, to read in the church, to assist in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and to perform any of the ministerial functions except to pronounce the formula of absolution and to consecrate the elements in the Lord's Supper. The care of the poor is not the work of the deacons but of church wardens. In practice the diaconate is a stepping stone to the priesthood, and deacons are in effect candidates for the ministry. They also constitute an order in the ministry.

The Methodist Church in this country had its origin in the Church of England and is formed after its pattern with respect to the diaconate. Methodists also consider deacons as an order in the ministry. They authorize deacons to conduct divine worship, to administer baptism, to assist an elder (that is a preacher) in administering the Lord's Supper, and to perform the marriage ceremony. The duties prescribed for their deacons and their elders (that is their ministers) are the same, except that in the case of the Lord's Supper the elder administers it while the deacon only assists him. Methodists elect their deacons at an Annual Conference which is composed of a lay delegate of every church in a given district and all its ministers. At that time they are introduced into their office by the bishop with the laying on of hands.

In the episcopal Churches therefore the original pur-

pose of the diaconate has disappeared. For in those Churches it does not relate to the care of the poor but to spiritual interests for which the office was not instituted.

#### THEIR DUTIES IN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

In the Baptist churches there are no elders, but deacons function largely as elders. Deacons have the leadership in congregational affairs. They represent the church not only in the care of the poor but also in the exercise of discipline, and they are the advisors of the pastor. Their responsibilities concern the spiritual interests of the church for the most part. In some Baptist churches deacons serve for life and in others for a three-year term.

As he sensed the difference between the deacons of New Testament times and those of Baptist churches, a leading Baptist writer on ecclesiology of our day acknowledged "In perfect sincerity we should recognize that the offices of bishop and deacon in New Testament times were quite different from functions which we today designate by these names."

In Congregational-Christian Churches there also are no elders, and deacons to some extent take their place. They are the pastor's advisors, they have the oversight of the congregation, and their work concerns spiritual interests for the most part. Though deacons used to be ordained in Congregational churches, this practice has been discontinued in most of the congregations. Formerly they served for life and they still do perhaps in some congregations. but in most churches they serve for a limited term of years.



## DEACONESSSES

## WHETHER SCRIPTURE GIVES WARRANT FOR THE OFFICE

There is one New Testament text, and possibly two, which may seem to substantiate the claim that there is warrant for the office of deaconess. Paul mentions Phebe as one who "is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea" (Rom. 16:1). The Greek word for servant is "diakonon," the word generally translated "deacon." Not a few conclude, because Phebe is called deaconess, that there was such a New Testament office. But that conclusion is hardly warranted when the evidence is so slender. The word "diakonon" means to serve or to minister, and it may very well be that the word is here used in its ordinary sense with no implication of official title. The context is moreover in favor of this conclusion for almost immediately there follows "for she hath been a helper of many and of mine own self." In these words it would seem that Paul is saying what he meant when he called her a "diakonon." Whereas Paul speaks of her as a benefactor also "of mine own self," pointing to a personal service rendered, one is hardly warranted in regarding her as a benefactor or deaconess in an official capacity.

In the other text referred to, the word "deaconess" does not at all occur. We read "women in like manner must be grave, not slanderers, temperate, faithful" (I Tim. 3:11). The word "women" must refer to the wives of the deacons, or the wives of both deacons and elders, or to the assumed deaconesses. All three views have their supporters. The word for "women" occurs also in the next following verse. If now in I Tim. 3:11 we should read in effect "deaconesses," then consistently it would seem that we ought to

read it similarly in the immediately following verse, and then we would have this rendering "Let the deacons be the husband of one deaconess"—an impossible translation to be sure. This is but one reason—not given perhaps in any of the commentaries—why we should conclude that the word "women" in I Tim. 3:11 refers to the wives of the deacons and not to the supposed office of deaconess. And the commentaries give several other reasons besides.

#### HISTORY AS TO DEACONESSSES.

In the Christian literature of the first three centuries there is no reference to deaconesses as constituting an office in the early Church. Later however there was such an office and it continued in the Eastern churches to the end of the twelfth century.

In the time of the Reformation the Reformed churches of the Netherlands for a short while favored the instituting of the office of deaconess, but already in 1581 they decided not to introduce it. On the whole, Reformed churches in the Netherlands favor the employment of women in support of the deacon's office when this is needed, but they are opposed to placing women in official service.

In 1836 a movement was begun in the Lutheran churches of Germany which made the office of deaconess popular. In the established Church of England the office dates from 1861. The Methodists in England, called Wesleyans there, also instituted the office in their churches, as did also the established Presbyterian Church of Scotland, and the Moravian Church.

In America deaconesses are found in one form or

another in the following denominations: Lutherans, Evangelical and Reformed, United Brethren, the Protestant Episcopal Church, The Methodist Church, Baptist churches, Congregational-Christian Churches, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE MOVEMENT

“Deaconesses for the most part have a Home together; unmarried women only are admitted to membership; they must pass through a preparatory course of training; no vow of perpetual service is required; a single distinctive costume is worn; affiliation with relatives and friends is not forbidden; a suitable support is provided both for the time of active service and of disability; the service is that of caring for the poor and the sick, teaching and training the young, and reforming the immoral.”



## CHAPTER EIGHT

# ELDERS

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### ELDERS IN THE CHURCH IN THE TIME OF THE APOSTLES

#### THE ORIGIN OF THE ELDER'S OFFICE

The name elder, as applied to an office in the New Testament Church, occurs in Scripture for the first time in Acts 11:30 where it is said of the gifts for the Jerusalem church that the money was sent "to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul." The office receives here only incidental mention, and neither here nor elsewhere is there an account given of its origin. In contrast to this a full account appears of the origin of the deacon's office in the sixth chapter of Acts. "If the sacred historian dwells at length on the institution of the lower office but is silent about the first beginnings of the higher, the explanation seems to be that the latter had not the claim of novelty like the former."

The office of elder in the New Testament Church had its origin in a similar office in the Jewish synagogue. With their conversion to Christianity the Jews met in what they continued to call "synagogues." These Christian synagogues rather naturally took over the form of organization to which the Jews had been accustomed, including their supervision by elders. The dispersion of the Jews in other countries than Palestine helped to establish this office also in



the churches composed of heathen converts, who in the form of their organization naturally were influenced by the already existing Jewish-Christian churches. And so it came about that the early Christian churches had the office of elder without there being a record of the institution of this office.

#### A NUMBER OF ELDERS IN EVERY CHURCH

Beginning with the very first mention of the office of elder in Acts 11:30, quoted previously, the New Testament speaks of a plurality of elders in every church. Not only did the Jerusalem church have a number of elders, but also in Asia Minor, Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey appointed a number of elders in every church (Acts 14:23). The church at Ephesus also had a plurality of elders as is evident from the account of Paul's farewell address to them (Acts 20:17ff). To Titus Paul gave instruction to ordain elders in every city (Titus 1:5). And to the sick the apostle James gave the exhortation to call for the elders of the church (James 5:14).

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### CHURCHES TODAY WITH OR WITHOUT ELDERS

#### EPISCOPALLY- AND INDEPENDENTLY-GOVERNED CHURCHES

In the Roman Catholic Church there are no elders, nor have there been ever since shortly after the time of the primitive Church. All that is left of the ancient eldership in the Roman Church is the parish priest. This is true also of the established Church of England and the Protestant Episcopal Church of this country, wherein however

the priest is commonly known as rector. These Churches have in each congregation a vestry, charged with the care of temporal affairs, but these are not clothed with the power to rule nor is divine warrant claimed for their position. In practice however these vestrymen perform some of the work that is done by elders in presbyterially-governed churches. In The Methodist Church the name elder is in common use, but by this word is meant a teaching elder or what in other Churches is known as a minister or ministerial superintendent. The elder conducts divine worship, administers the sacraments, and performs marriage ceremonies; and the presiding elder, or district superintendent, has charge of all the elders and deacons within his district. That the independently-governed Baptist churches and Congregational-Christian Churches have no elders, that some of their ablest leaders have all along acknowledged the desirability of having them in every church, and that the government in these churches is in part intrusted to their deacons, was considered previously in Chapter Two, "Congregational Church Polity."

#### PRESBYTERIALLY-GOVERNED CHURCHES

All Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, ever since the days of the Reformation, have had the practice of having in every congregation, besides the pastor, a number of men called elders to whom was intrusted the government of the church. Presbyterian denominations, such as the established Church of Scotland, object to the term "lay elder." for they believe that the elder is one of the clergy. In Reformed Churches this is not an issue.

Earlier in this volume it was stated that the adherents

of independently-governed Churches are about equal in number to those of the presbyterially-governed Churches, and that, even when the Lutherans are classed with the latter, nevertheless, the number of adherents of either the independent or presbyterial polities are dwarfed by the number of adherents of episcopal polity, particularly, because this polity includes the large Roman Catholic Church. It follows, that those denominations are very much in a minority which have a group of elders for the government of each local church. And the growth of these presbyterially-governed denominations since the time of the Reformation has not been phenomenal at all, as compared with the growth of the Churches otherwise governed. There ought therefore to be no feeling of complacency on the part of the Churches presbyterially-governed, and particularly not on the part of the elders themselves.

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## AN APPRAISAL OF THE ELDERSHIP

### THE STRENGTH OF A GOVERNING ELDERSHIP

The presbyterian form of government for the local church by means of an authoritative group of lay elders, who together with the minister manage the affairs of the congregation, is undoubtedly the best. For one thing, it is the Scriptural form—and that is an altogether sufficient reason for regarding it as the best. The New Testament, both by example and precept, obligates the Churches to adopt the presbyterian form of local church government. Moreover, reason also commends it as the best polity. How much better it is that the affairs of a church are to a large extent managed by a group of leading men, rather than

by the pastor alone or by the whole congregation. The pure democracy of independency is not even workable, as is seen in the actual practice of independent churches who do their work largely through a body of men functioning somewhat similarly to a Reformed Consistory or Presbyterian Session. A group of elders, if functioning properly, furnish the pastor with the counsel and the support of an intelligent and leading portion of the congregation. Delicate decisions, which if made by the pastor alone, would cause him to lose the support of a part of the church, in presbyterial polity are made by the Consistory or Session—against which the waves of dissatisfaction, on the part of some within the congregation, break rather harmlessly. The elders form a protection for the pastor against the possible caprice or unfairness of the congregation when it is assembled together, and they also are a protection for the people against any possible attempt on the part of the pastor to lord it over God's heritage.

In presbyterian polity the Consistory or Session is pivotal in local church government. One writer stresses their significance by saying that in Presbyterian and Reformed Churches there is no class of men on whom, under God, the prosperity of religion is so much dependent as upon those invested with the office of the eldership. It is customary to think of the pastor as all-important. In episcopal and independent systems of polity he is. But in presbyterial polity even the efficiency or deficiency of the minister is largely determined by that tremendously influential group of men known as the Consistory or Session. It is this body which represents both the good and the evil in the congregation, which stamps its character upon every new member that is added to its number, that largely

decides the type of minister that is to shepherd the flock, and that abides while pastors come and go, which in presbyterial polity, more than the congregation and more even than the minister, determines, under God, whether or not there is to be any progress of religion in the congregation and to what degree.

#### THE WEAKNESSES OF THE ELDERSHIP IN PRACTICE

If from the present time to a century from now there would be a gradual decline in the quality of Consistories and Sessions, such elders, as would enter the councils of a century from now for the first time, would soon become accustomed to the atmosphere of the councils of their day, and they would almost certainly have no knowledge of the better conditions that prevailed long before their time. What we can imagine to be the case in the future, may very well be the situation now! As elders accustom themselves to the local council, they will likely not seriously reflect as to whether things were better long ago, or whether they ought not to be better now. But such reflection is important! It may very well be that over the governing eldership, as well as over the Church, a slowly-creeping paralysis has spread—covering a period of several or many decades. Elders should not merely take precautions against falling into evil habits, but they should consider also whether they are not already greatly in error and whether they should not take measures to get out of a depth of error.

An important task of every elder is to stand guard over the pulpit and to insist on the pure preaching of the Word of God. On this score the elders not only of some local churches but even of some entire denominations have



for years been most seriously at fault. The history of Presbyterian or Reformed denominations that became liberal or modern is not only one which accuses the many ministers who led their flocks astray, but that history is also one which most gravely indicts that even larger number of elders who for many years were sleeping at the switch. In liberal churches or denominations the present elders, accustomed as they are to the type of messages they have always heard, are not even able to judge what a sermon really ought to be; and they might even think it to be their duty to approve of a minister who does not expound the Word of God faithfully, or to oppose one who proclaims it purely.

Likely the most common weakness of the eldership of all presbyterially-governed Churches is the tendency to be content with the performance of little more than work of a formal character—such as the attendance of religious services, the meetings of the council, and those of the broader assemblies. But there is more—a great deal more—to being a real elder according to the New Testament pattern of this office. The true elder, in addition to being deeply spiritual in his own individual life, is one who has the care of the flock constantly upon his mind, and who makes it a point to contact members of the flock, after the services or during the week, in order to speak to them a word of exhortation, of kind rebuke, or of consolation or commendation, as the need may be. His work of an administrative character, so far from being almost the sum total of his labor, is but the more formal and minor aspect of it. For religious progress in the congregation the power of a group of elders can be so very great but it is so frequently so very small.

Many a writer for decades past with deep feeling has expressed concern about the eldership. A writer already half a century ago sounded this warning: "There are men willing enough to have the office of elder, and the honor whatever that may be, but are unwilling to do the work of the office. If a man seeketh the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. If he does not desire the work, he should not seek the office." And almost a century ago another writer said "Occasionally are to be found men who seek to lord it over God's heritage, to rule indeed in the church of God, to rule pastor as well as people, and their brother elders also—all but themselves; not aware in their ambition, or vanity, or unconscious love of mischief, that there is an evil spirit within them which drives them to do wrong. Such elders there are unhappily. Diotrephes sometimes manages to get votes, and to find his way through the solemnities of ordination into the ruling eldership, and then he does vast mischief."

To the universal desire for power the eldership of today is not immune. Among the very first group of elders, the chosen twelve, there was strife as to which of them was the greatest, and Jesus found it necessary to rebuke them. Later generations of elders failed to heed Jesus' warning and strove among themselves until one climbed above his fellows and became the bishop; and the bishops continued the struggle for power till one climbed above the others and became the archbishop; and the archbishops continued, till finally the Pope emerged on top. Since Protestantism broke away from Rome to be done with the Pope for good, every elder in the Protestant Churches should be resolved once and for all to avoid every form of the lust for power (which in the Pope of Rome shows to what such lust logi-

cally leads). The early Reformers—as there is considerable evidence to show—were much concerned about avoiding a recurrence of what had happened in the Roman Church. In so far as the Churches as a whole are concerned, Protestantism has succeeded in avoiding such a recurrence; but, in so far as the local church in presbyterial polity is concerned, that is a different matter. The ever-recurring sin of man to want to rule rather than to serve, even as the early disciples, has done great damage to the local churches in presbyterial polity. And the over-emphasis in Reformed, and especially in Presbyterian Churches, on the elder being a “ruling” elder has no doubt contributed not a little to the desire for power in these Churches.

Elders who in effect must give the nod in order for a proposal to carry, or of whom other elders and perhaps even the pastor live somewhat in fear, are not the elders who serve the Kingdom best, even though they be in some respects the most able men. One of the established principles of presbyterial polity is that there be also among the elders parity or equality, and that ideal should be approached in practice as nearly as possible. The elders as a group must constitute a genuine council, and to that end even the subtle forms of dictatorship within the Consistory or Session should be studiously avoided.

Since a Consistory or Session naturally represents the weakness of a congregation as well as its strength, a minister, bent upon reform, is rather likely to be confronted in the council by a want of cooperation with his ideals. The council, which in presbyterial polity can be such a tremendous power for good, in practice is rather often a

bottleneck to needed reforms and spiritual progress. Many a time it stands in the way of a pastor's most effective ministry.

Rather often it happens that a congregation desires a different type of minister, and it may very well be that a different one is needed. However, it is also very well possible that the desire for another type of minister is but the expression of a deeper need in the congregation for another type of Consistory or Session—a need of which the congregation itself is likely not aware. A recent writer says “Even a body of elders can become hardened into a routine which may need to be broken.”

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## QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE OFFICE OF ELDER

### THOSE SPECIFICALLY REQUIRED BY SCRIPTURE

The Word of God in I Tim. 3:2-6 and Titus 1:7 states that the negative qualifications of an elder are the following: not a lover of money or greedy of filthy lucre, nor a novice, nor contentious or soon angry, nor self willed, nor a brawler or a striker—or, to put these all together, without reproach and blameless.

The Bible in I Tim. 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9 gives also the positive qualifications for the eldership. An elder must be a lover of good, gentle, given to hospitality, just, holy, orderly, temperate, self-controlled, and sober-minded. He must be one that rules well his own household, having his children in subjection with all gravity, having children that are not accused of riot or unruly and who moreover are believing children. Furthermore, an elder must have a good

report of those that are without. And, finally, he must not only hold to the faithful Word but also be apt to teach it.

### ABILITY TO TEACH

In the very first years of the New Testament Church the apostles themselves instructed the early converts, and the work of the elders was possibly only administrative and governmental. But as the Church grew, and the apostles, neither themselves alone nor even with the aid of their special emissaries, could attend to all the instruction and preaching necessary, the work of teaching was transferred gradually from the traveling missionary preachers to the office bearers of the local congregation. With this newly-developed situation in view, Paul affirms that ability to teach is a necessary qualification of the eldership. To the elders of Ephesus he says "feed the church of God," to Timothy he says that the elder must be "apt to teach," and to Titus he says that the elder must "be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Acts 20:28; I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9).

### KNOWLEDGE OF THE CHURCH'S DOCTRINE AND POLITY

The doctrines of the Church in their relation to one another should be known by the elder, if he is to qualify as one that stands guard over the purity of the preaching and if he is to be considered as apt to teach. And he must know the government or polity of the Church in order to give direction in the questions on polity that present themselves from time to time. Particularly, also, when gathered in council with the other elders, must he know the Church's polity or doctrine. It will not suffice for the majority of



the elders to look to just one or a few of the elders, or to the minister, for guidance. For what is the value of the others being present if a few decide the issues anyhow? By such a procedure the essential, deliberative character of the council is lost. Membership in the council implies ability to counsel, and one without such ability should not be made an elder. It is therefore an elder's business to be informed on matters of doctrine and polity.

#### THE DESIRABILITY OF A TRAINING

A number of years ago the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. had before it a proposal which was in part as follows: "Whereas the Church rightly requires of the minister that before ordination he shall have had four years of college and three years of theological seminary, or their equivalent, and must by examination satisfy the presbytery as to his qualifications and fitness to be a minister before he is ordained as such . . . Be it resolved, that brief but wisely chosen courses of study be selected, designed to prepare and equip the newly-elected elder for spiritual, constructive, and fruitful service in his high office."

When it be considered what a contrast there is between the elder and the minister as to their training, as suggested in the aforesaid overture; and also when it be considered at the same time that the contrast is just the other way when it comes to the power of the ballot, then it ought to be acknowledged that there is a tremendous obligation that rests upon the untrained elder as he decides the issues by his vote, while the lone trained minister in that respect sits almost powerlessly by. And that sense of obligation should cause the elder also to do whatever he can to improve the quality of the eldership.

## THE OBLIGATIONS OF AN ELDER

### AS SUGGESTED IN THE LABORS OF THE N. T. ELDERS

The work of the New Testament elders pertained to the Word of God for they are spoken of as those "who labor in the word and in teaching," who "feed the church of the Lord," who are "able both to exhort in the sound doctrine and to convict the gainsayers," and who "spake unto you the word of God" (I Tim. 5:17; Acts 20:28; Titus 1:9; Heb. 13:7). With respect to both the Word of God and the people of God they were God's "stewards" (Titus 1:7). As to the members of the church they are spoken of as those who "watch in behalf of your souls," and take "heed to all the flock," as "bishops" or overseers over the members, as "exercising the oversight," and as being such as "rule" over them (Heb. 13:17; Acts 20:28; I Pet. 5:2; I Tim. 3:5; 5:17; Heb. 13:7, 17). As to the members they also "helped the weak" and visited the sick and prayed over them (Acts 20:35; James 5:14). And they participated in assemblies (Acts 15:6, 22, 23; 21:18ff).

### THEIR OTHER RELATED DUTIES

To the list of elder's duties suggested in Scripture there should be added other obligations, kindred to them, such as: the obligation of elders to acquaint themselves with all of their flock and their needs, to keep the pastor informed as to these needs, to aid the pastor with helpful suggestions, and to promote loyalty to him; to attend to it that the children and the youth are instructed in catechism, in Christian day schools, and in Sunday schools; to judge of the fitness of those who desire to become members of the church; to develop the spiritual life of the mem-

bers by promoting faithful church attendance and participation in the sacraments, by promoting faithfulness to covenant obligations, religious week-day meetings, family worship, prayer, and religious reading; to preserve the purity of the church by attending to the purity of the preaching and by the faithful exercise of discipline; to reclaim the wandering; to promote evangelism; and to urge faithful stewardship in order to further the larger Kingdom interests as well as to care for local needs.

All these obligations together constitute a truly imposing list, suggesting the great need in every congregation of a group of elders, and also the great need that they with the highest consecration apply themselves faithfully to their work.

#### THE TERM "RULING ELDER"

In Presbyterian Churches it is the regular practice to refer to the elder as a "ruling elder" and to emphasize the distinction between the ruling elder and the teaching elder, or the minister. Reformed Churches do not frequently employ the term "ruling elder," but they also lay considerable stress on the elder's work of ruling or governing.

The adherents of presbyterial polity are criticized for this emphasis by independent writers. These writers say that the distinction between ruling and teaching elders rests upon only one text, I Tim. 5:17, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching." On this one text, say independent writers, presbyterial polity places a greater weight than it can bear since a careful

exegesis will not allow so emphatic a distinction. The functions of teaching and of ruling are said to have both belonged to the same office, even though each of the early elders devoted himself more or less exclusively to the one or the other of these, as each had his special gift.

John Calvin was the first of Reformed writers to have directed attention to I Tim. 5:17 as showing a distinction between the elder who governs and the minister who instructs. However Calvin did not use the term "ruling elder." He preferred the simple words "elder" or "overseer" because they were the Scriptural names, because they well expressed the elder's work, and because they did not encourage the tendency to lord it over others. To Calvin the primary task of the elder was his purely spiritual labor which was performed in the exercise of discipline. Governing or ruling, to be sure, is included in that spiritual labor but it is only a part of it.

The choice of the term "ruling elder" is not a happy one. It places too much emphasis on only one phase of the elder's work, it encourages the tendency to lord it over others, and it fails to distinguish the elder from the pastor for both are supposed to rule. There must indeed be government or rule by means of the elders, but this is not their only task, nor even the most important. Their most significant obligation is the spiritual care and edification of the congregation, and of this larger obligation the task of ruling is only a part.

The distinction between elders as rulers and ministers as teachers has been over-emphasized. It ignores the calling of the pastor to also rule, and—what is more serious—it ignores the elder's obligation to teach. This duty, plainly

taught in Scripture as was previously shown, should not be minimized. All elders should lay it to heart that the duty of governing should not be emphasized to the exclusion of the duty of feeding, even though they must attend to this task of teaching in a more limited way than the minister and in a different form. For there is no true ruling or shepherding except there be feeding.

#### AN ELDER TO SERVE IF ELECTED

If an elder be elected and he objects to serve, the Consistory or Session must consider the merit of his objection. Without good reason no one should be excused from service. When the country calls its citizens for military service, those called must serve—and even unto death; how much the more should there be readiness to serve in the honorable office of elder when the King of the Church calls the citizens of His kingdom to such service. The Consistory or Session should however be reasonable in refusing to let the objection stand, and it should reckon with the objector's right of appeal.

#### AN ELDER TO SERVE NOT SELF BUT CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

Whenever an elder uses the word "office" in the sense of dignity or authority whereby distinction is conferred upon himself or whereby prominence and influence in the community is imparted to him, then he uses the word "office" in a manner that is in conflict with the original meaning of the word. For the word "office" means to serve. The dignity and authority that is conferred upon an elder by reason of his office is granted unto him not for his own exultation but for the sake of Christ and His



Church. Dignity and authority are endowed for the sake of service—frequently the most difficult kind of service. Paul so conceived of the matter in his own case as he expressed it in these words “our authority which the Lord gave for building you up and not for casting you down” (II Cor. 10:8). And Peter exhorts elders not to be “lording it over the charge allotted” but to be “ensamples to the flock” (I Pet. 5:3). And Jesus himself said “he that is the greater among you, let him become . . . as he that doth serve” (Luke 22:26). The distinctive character of leadership in the Church of Christ is not dignity or authority but service.

#### AN ELDER A REPRESENTATIVE OF CHRIST

The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. regards an elder as a representative of the people, and the minister as a representative of Christ or God. To be sure, an elder is a representative of the people. However, a more distinctively Reformed concept is that he is a representative of Christ. He receives also his authority from Christ, the King of the Church. Through the elders Christ continues His kingly work of governing the Church. The need of good government in the Church by elders follows from Christ's sovereignty over it and from His mandate to His representatives, the elders. And these are not to do first of all the will of the people, much less their own will, but the will of Christ, the King of the Church.

#### THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE ELDERS TO THE MINISTER

In presbyterial polity the Consistory or Session exercises a greater control over the minister than is exercised

by any group within independent or episcopal congregations. But this control lays upon the eldership of presbyterially-governed churches the solemn obligation to use it judiciously.

The problem of long pastorates, which frequently afflicts churches holding the presbyterian polity, calls the more for considerateness on the part of the elders toward their minister. They should not assume that the want of a call is simply the fault of the pastor, for there are indeed other important factors that account for this as well. Ministers in Presbyterian and Reformed Churches are subjected to the strain of long pastorates due to the character of their polity; and elders, who within the domain of this polity have so great a power over the ministry, ought to be most sympathetic toward pastors confined long to one place—as they would not be if they belonged to Churches having another polity.

A minister is the spiritual captain of a congregation. As he leads it in the warfare against sin and in consecrated service of its King, the congregation should follow his direction, and the elders should be the foremost of those that follow. In the congregation it should be as in military warfare wherein the subordinate officers, even more than the private soldiers, are foremost in carrying out the orders of their superior. If a minister has not proved himself to be an unsafe leader, he should receive the hearty support of his church, and especially of the elders. Dislike of some of his characteristics should never be considered a sufficient reason for not following him. Often a Consistory or Session regards itself as a necessary brake upon the pastor; and still more frequently it fails to give him its hearty

support simply because of negligence. As one writer expresses it, this in presbyterial polity "is one of the tragedies of ministerial life."

The prevalent tendency to continue to look upon the minister as an outsider does much harm. Consistories or Sessions should think of their pastor as one of themselves, as their own leader, which love they voluntarily chose and which choice they should later also love. In their personal contacts with one another elders should resolutely refrain from strengthening each other in any dissatisfaction toward their pastor. Where there is indifference to this admonition, a minister stands powerless to maintain good relations for he is in a class by himself while the elders are many. And never should elders value a minister only in the measure that they can make use of him to their own ends.

Since a minister also is a faulty mortal, he will on occasion say or do the wrong thing. An elder cannot approve of such fault, to be sure; however, while admitting it, if need be, he can and should at the same time affirm his confidence in the minister as being nevertheless sincere and as wanting to do and to say the right thing. While acknowledging a fault of the pastor, an elder should at the same time promote loyalty toward him.

Elders should stand as a wall between their pastor and reproaches against him which impair his usefulness. As Aaron and Hur upheld the hands of Moses, so should elders uphold their minister in his difficult leadership in the war against sin and in the promotion of the Christian life.

Freely and confidentially an elder should consult with

his pastor—and he should do this even though there are things about the pastor which are not to his liking. Any matter in the congregation, including criticisms, of which the pastor is perhaps not aware and which knowledge could assist him toward a more effective ministry, should be called to his attention. A few words of explanation at the commencement of a dissatisfaction may lead to its removal; while, if left to go on and to spread, it may result in serious difficulty. Criticisms of sermons ought not to be made publicly and at once after the service but privately and some time afterward.

While elders need to get along with but one minister, he has to get along with a number of elders, each of whom has his defects as well as has the minister. Elders should pray for the minister, also because he is the only one in the congregation who has no pastor.

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## HOW TO WORK TOGETHER

### EXPRESSION WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE COUNCIL

In the Christian Reformed Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons these words formerly occurred: “Moreover it is proper that such men be joined to the ministers of the Word in the government of the Church, to the end, that thereby all tyranny and lording may be kept out of the Church of God, which may sooner creep in, when the government is placed in the hands of one alone, or of a few.” However such lording is not infrequently present even though there be a Consistory or Session for in many a council one or a few members determine the issues almost

regularly, and thereby frustrate the true character of the council. A member has no reason for being proud of it if he frequently succeeds in having his own way within the council. The best leadership is that which encourages all the members of the council to think and to express their thoughts. And only those who can give such leadership and those who can take a proper part in the counseling of the council should be given a place in it.

A council should guard itself against the possibility that a few of its number manœuvre behind its back, agreeing as to their attitude and procedure in pending matters or cases. Also by this the essential character of the council is frustrated. This is rebellion against good order, treason against the council, and intrigue which is pregnant with grave consequences. The Consistory or Session *as a whole* is the council, and counseling should be done when the council is meeting as a body.

Because that which is considered on meetings of a Consistory or Session is often of an intimate, confidential, and personal character, secrecy is essential. When through a council member or one of his family it becomes known who brings up a matter on the council meetings, what is said about the matter or about persons, and how the members voted, then the council itself gives rise to mutual suspicion, to animosity, and to opposition both within and without the council, and it makes its own continued working as a council almost impossible and ineffective. Warnings against this should be made from time to time, and if this does not help, the council should take the guilty party to task, for this is an evil which the council may not condone.



However much the views of the council members may clash in the meetings, when the Consistory or Session expresses itself to those without, it should speak as one voice. There may be no knowledge in the congregation of division within the council. Only the majority will has the right of being heard, in order that the congregation may by it be guided, governed, and especially unified.

### THE WORK OF THE COUNCIL

The Minutes should state who are absent and why. They should not include the opinions and considerations expressed but only the decisions with their grounds. Upon approval they should be signed at once by the president and the clerk. It is preferable to use a pen in writing the concept Minutes, and these should be approved before the council adjourns.

No one should be permitted to make an extract of the Minutes except with the previous approval of the whole Consistory or Session to whom the Minutes belong.

In the Reformed Church in America the Minutes of every Consistory meeting are laid before the Classis at least once a year (and those of the Classis are laid before the Particular Synod). The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. has the same rulings.

Only ecclesiastical matters should be considered in the meetings of the council, and these should be dealt with in an ecclesiastical manner. Ecclesiastical matters include material matters in so far as they concern the Church. They exclude civil matters for these belong to the domain of the civil courts; however, the council must concern itself with the hatred that may be engendered by these matters.

Things of special importance are considered in the Reformed Church in America by what is called the Great Consistory which is composed of all those who at any time served in the Consistory as well as those in office at the time. This is the practice also in the established Reformed Church of the Netherlands, and in that Church it was the practice already to some extent as far back as the seventeenth century.

In the Sessions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. the minister has no vote except in the case of a tie while in the Christian Reformed Church he always votes if the voting be by ballot.

It is customary in some denominations, as in the Christian Reformed Church, to send a committee when a member must be contacted with whom there is some difficulty. Not infrequently such committee does harm rather than good, due to their fear of losing a friend or friends, or due to their lack of courage or ability. Often better results can be obtained by summoning such person before the Consistory or Session, where the person is more manageable than in his own home and where all the council members are witnesses to what is said. A person summoned must come, in view of his promise of submission at the time of his profession of faith and in view of the Scriptural requirement of submission to authorities (Heb. 13:17; I Pet. 5:5). The Reformed Church in America, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and even the Congregational-Christian Churches rule that he who refuses to answer a summons is censurable. In said Churches even witnesses are censurable if they fail to answer a summons. In the Orthodox Presbyterian Church a witness even of another con-

gregation must appear if summoned through his Session.

In the Christian Reformed Church it is a rule that the ministers, elders, and deacons of the Consistory, four times annually, "exercise Christian censure among themselves, and in a friendly spirit admonish one another with regard to the discharge of their office." This criticism must of course never descend to the level of fault finding. It must be exercised in love, and for the good of the Church, and for the glory of God. After the president of the council has asked in general whether there is any criticism to offer, each should be asked to reply in turn. In the Reformed Church in America, instead of mutual censure of office bearers, their Consistory, before the celebration of the Lord's Supper, considers "whether to the knowledge of those present any member in full communion has departed from the faith or has behaved unworthily of the Christian profession." Both of these policies are good and each of these Churches should complement its rule by adding that of the other Church.

A special meeting of the Consistory or Session cannot take valid action unless all the members are properly notified beforehand. Decisions taken at an illegal meeting must be declared void. Special meetings are called together by the minister in the Christian Reformed Church. In the Reformed Church in America the president must call a special meeting at the request of three Consistory members.

As to the exercise of oversight over the congregation it is a good policy to divide it into districts, each of which are assigned to an elder, as is the rule in the United Church of Canada.

## THE TENURE OF THE ELDER'S OFFICE

### HISTORY OF HIS TENURE OF OFFICE

The New Testament does not with a word speak of the termination of the elder's office nor of his holding the office for the duration of his life. From this silence John Calvin concluded that it could not be proven that the office was for life, and accordingly he instituted term eldership. Later the Presbyterian Churches concluded from that same silence that it could not be proven that the New Testament elders served but for a limited time, and accordingly they instituted life tenure.

Under Calvin the term of the elder's office was for one year but annual reelection might follow; and this was recommended in the case of those who had served acceptably. It was customary to inquire annually as to whether the conduct of an elder was such as to commend his reelection.

A few of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands in the sixteenth century introduced life tenure. But not long afterward limited tenure became the rule in all the Reformed churches. Limited tenure was deemed preferable because it helped to prevent tyranny by distributing the authority of the eldership over a larger number. As far back as the national Synod of 1581 fear was expressed that elders would seek to employ the dignity and authority of their office to their own advantage, and warning reference was made to what the history of the matter had been in the Roman Catholic Church. Limited tenure was considered preferable also because it gave a larger number opportunity to participate in the government of

the church. And limited tenure was preferred because it required less of an elder's time and energy for he also had his family to provide for. This reason was the more urgent because of the very great amount of time that was then devoted to the work of the elder.

Though the Synod of Dort, 1618-'19, had ruled that the term of service for elders be two years, they actually served from three to six years in the established Reformed Church of the Netherlands from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. In the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, which originated in 1834, elders serve from four to six years. In the Christian Reformed Church of this country and also in the Reformed Church in America they serve two and three years. In the Christian Reformed Church they formerly were subject to reelection at once, but now a year must intervene before a possible reelection may take place.

The Presbyterian churches of Scotland in their First Book of Discipline of 1560 made annual term service the rule. This Book of Discipline was composed under the leadership of John Knox. Until a year previously he had been studying under Calvin at Geneva where annual term service was the rule. The reasons for adopting limited tenure in Scotland were the same as the aforesaid reasons why the established Reformed Church of the Netherlands soon after this preferred limited tenure.

In the Scottish Second Book of Discipline, adopted in 1581, it was ruled that elders should hold office for life; and if necessary, work in relays, so that they would not have to be in active service all the time. This Second Book of Discipline therefore required perpetuity of office



but not perpetuity of service. This idea of life tenure is said to have been conceived by the aristocracy in Scottish church life in those days. The common people at the time are said to have been "little better than serfs and bondmen;" and "the tendency of an aristocracy is always to support permanency of official position."

The established Church of Scotland, of which those early churches of the sixteenth century were the antecedents, did not however continue to hold to the necessity of life tenure for already a century ago life tenure was not a requisite.

Some of the members of those early Scottish churches, at the time when limited tenure was still the rule, moved to the vicinity of Newburyport, Massachusetts, and continued annual election of office bearers for centuries while united with the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (though the denomination as a whole practiced life tenure all this time). After maintaining life tenure for more than two hundred years, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. in 1876 was compelled by practical considerations to introduce, in addition to permanent eldership, also term eldership. There was considerable debate upon the matter at the time, some writers also directing attention to it that their practice of life tenure was in conflict with Reformed practice generally. Some fifteen years ago it was estimated that in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. the largest number of congregations at the time employed three-year term service, subject to reelection; while a considerable and increasing number, after one or two terms of three-year service, required that a year intervene before a possible reelection might take place. The said Presby-

terian Church still maintains life tenure of office even though term service was introduced. Elders retain their office upon the expiration of the three-year term of service even though they are not reelected; and elders, even though not in active service, may be delegated to the major assemblies. Their ordination is for life, and in the case of reelection, they are not reordained but only installed, or re-installed.

It is well possible that some Presbyterian denominations still insist on life service as well as life tenure of office.

#### APPRAISAL OF TERM ELDERSHIP

Limited tenure as compared with life tenure has the advantage of helping to prevent the elders from assuming too much power, of giving a larger number opportunity of becoming familiar with the government of the church, of constantly seeking for the best leadership in the church, and of enabling those chosen also to give their best service since they need serve for only a limited time.

But term service has great disadvantages also; especially the shorter periods of service. Instruction of the eldership by the pastor is made the more difficult by reason of its constantly changing personnel. For the elder it takes some time to become familiar with the work in the Consistory or Session, and toward the close of the term of service he is tempted to leave unpleasant tasks to his successors, so that the period wherein he gives his best service is considerably shorter than the actual term of service.

The weakest point in term service is the need of subjecting the elder again and again to the vote of the people.

It is far from merely imaginary to suppose that an elder is influenced in his work by the thought of his dependence on the good will of his associates and the congregation, in order to be reelected. The minister can best see the dependent position of the elder by supposing his own continued pastorate to be subject to repeated reelection by the people. The pastor's strength lies not a little in this that he is not subject to such reelection. But that which is the pastor's strength is the elder's weakness where term service is the rule. The cause of discipline undoubtedly suffers greatly by reason of this weakness.

Churches holding the presbyterial polity can and should devise a method of service for the eldership which avoids the weaknesses of both life service and of brief, limited service. They should agree upon some position midway between these two extremes, one which avoids the need of reelection or which at least mitigates some of the evils involved in reelection.

#### ORDINATION, INSTALLATION, AND RE-INSTALLATION

The Reformed Church in America does not re-install office bearers who are reelected in case the two terms are consecutive. In the Christian Reformed Church, however, they are not only re-installed but re-ordained each time they enter upon a new term of service, and regardless of whether the two terms of service are consecutive.

One can not speak seriously of ordination in the case of a person who is not appointed to an office for life. If there is a limited time attached, there should be no ordination. In such case it is better to speak of installing or confirming. In the case of the Presbyterian Church in the

U.S.A. which believes in life tenure, and in the case of the Reformed Church in America which holds to this also but in a more qualified way, it is correct to use the word "ordination" for the initial ceremony introducing the elder for the first time into his work. But since the Christian Reformed Church does not believe in life tenure, it should not use the word "ordination" for the initial entrance upon the elder's work, and still less should it employ this word for the repeated entrance upon each term of service.

In the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, when elders or deacons are ordained, the congregation also takes part by replying to a question either vocally or by raising the right hand. The ordination takes place with the laying on of hands by the minister. And it is accompanied by a hand of fellowship before the congregation on the part of those already in office.

## CHAPTER NINE

# V O T I N G

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### THE ELECTION OF OFFICE BEARERS

#### IN THE TIME OF THE APOSTLES

The Church of apostolic times gives valuable guidance in the selection of office bearers. It is singularly noteworthy that the apostles did not claim for themselves the right to determine even who should be their fellow apostle as a successor to Judas. The need of filling the vacancy was called to the attention of the hundred and twenty disciples, and these thereupon "put forward two, Joseph . . . and Matthias" (Acts 1:23). After the congregation had done this, "they gave lots for them and the lot fell upon Matthias" (Acts 1:26). Also, when the need was felt of having deacons, "the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said . . . look ye out therefore, brethren, from among you seven men . . . and they chose" the seven "whom they set before the apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid their hands upon them" (Acts 6:2-6). And the church of Jerusalem, as well as the apostles, sent forth Barnabas to Antioch, and later sent forth Judas and Silas to accompany Paul and Barnabas to Syria and Asia Minor (Acts 11:22; 15:22ff). The church at Jerusalem even summoned apostles before them and passed judgment upon their conduct (Acts 11:1-4). In other churches the appointment of elders took place by a showing



of the hands of the congregation, as a careful exegesis of Acts 14:23 seems to indicate. Such exegesis also points to a similar choice on the part of the congregation at Corinth, in sending forth its representatives to accompany Paul with its gift for the church at Jerusalem (I Cor. 16:3; II Cor. 8:19).

### IN THE TIME OF THE REFORMATION

In Geneva at the time of Calvin only magistrates from the two civic councils might become elders. This limitation was agreed upon to facilitate the working together of Church and State, and also in order to exclude from the Consistory unscrupulous persons who were members of the church not by choice but by law. The practice followed was not to the liking of Calvin as is evident from one of his letters wherein he says "now we have a court of presbyters . . . of such a kind as the weakness of the times allow."

In the sixteenth century in the congregation of a' Lasco at London, a church which was composed of refugees from the Netherlands, office bearers were selected in a most commendable manner. Previous to their election a day of fasting was prescribed. On the following Sunday the need and the nature of the offices were explained to the congregation, Holy Communion was observed, and thereupon the congregation voted. From those who received the most votes of the congregation the Consistory during the following week chose their new office bearers whose names were announced to the congregation the following Sunday. If the congregation raised no objections, the ordination followed later with the laying on of hands by the whole Consistory. Previous to the time of a' Lasco, Calvin had

already referred to this method as having the "greatest propriety" (Institutes, Bk. IV, Ch. 4, Sec. 12).

The early Presbyterian churches of Scotland in their First Book of Discipline of 1560 prescribed the rule that the Session should present to the congregation twice as many nominees as there were vacancies to be filled. The congregation might add to such list, and the members voted from the whole of it.

The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands in 1571 decided that elders and deacons should choose their own successors. However, the names of those chosen had to be announced to the congregation, and their installation might follow only if no sustainable objections against them were made. The national Synod of Dort, 1618-'19, added to the previous rule the provision that a Consistory might also present a double number and have the congregation choose the one half.

#### THE METHOD OF SELECTING OFFICE BEARERS

In not a few churches and likely even in whole denominations it is customary to have no nomination made by a Consistory, Session, or Board, but to have a free election by the congregation. Calvin particularly, and Reformed polity generally, have frowned upon this method as exposing the highest welfare of the Church to the caprice of the populace. Calvin maintained that there was need of the Consistory acting as a bridle upon the people to keep them in control.

In the earliest Presbyterian churches of Scotland and in Presbyterian denominations to this day the Session pre-

sents a nomination to the congregation but the latter may add to such list and choose its office bearers from the completed list. If use of this opportunity is made, this method to that extent has the weakness of a free election to which attention was just directed. And if in practice the congregation almost never adds names to the list of the Session, then this method gives the Session too much control, as in the case of the Consistories of the Reformed churches which is related in the paragraphs that follow.

In denominations, such as the Christian Reformed Church, it is still the custom merely to present a double number from which the congregation chooses half. In its mother denomination, the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, this method about half a century ago caused considerable dissatisfaction. Consequently many of its larger churches adopted the custom of having the congregation present a list to the Consistory, from which the latter made its nomination. And consequently also these Reformed Churches of the Netherlands in 1905 included among their rules the provision that "every church shall be at liberty . . . to give the members an opportunity to direct attention to suitable persons in order that the Consistory may thereupon . . . present a double number to the congregation." This stipulation was also included in 1914 in the new rules of the Christian Reformed Church of this country, but it has remained almost altogether a dead letter. This opportunity ought however to be given to the congregation! To make this provision really effective the members may be given this opportunity at a congregational meeting previous to the making of the nomination—if needs be, at the annual meeting, and the results of the balloting must then be preserved for the making of the nomination the follow-

ing year. It is a better method, shortly before the making of the nomination, to pass out a list of all eligible persons at a Sunday service and to receive the preliminary ballot the following Sunday. Before such opportunity is given it is well that something be said that will help the congregation to direct attention to really devoted and able men.

If the congregation has no voice in the making of the nomination, it has too little power and the Consistory has too much. Then the Consistory remains a self-perpetuating body and alone determines its membership. Then the congregation cannot express itself as to any member except such as the Consistory is willing to present to it. In churches that have this method the remark is frequently heard that nearly the same list of nominees is always presented and that pretty much the same persons are always in the Consistory. Consistory members are but human also, as others are. It is not to be supposed that the only thought which ever enters their mind in the making of the nomination is the consecration and ability of the persons—for consecrated and able members are frequently passed by. Consistory members do not always avoid voting upon the basis of who are likable to themselves. Too frequently also they are influenced altogether too much by the question whether a person has served before and how often.

The right of the congregation to assist in the making of the nomination follows from the Scriptural examples which were previously set forth. This is a privilege which belongs to the congregation not as a gift from the Consistory but as bestowed by Christ himself and which may not be withheld. This right of the congregation is also implied in Article 31 of the Belgic Confession which speaks of

office bearers as chosen "by a lawful election of the church."

In churches holding the presbyterial polity the best method of selecting office bearers is one which gives the congregation opportunity to help direct their choice, and which at the same time gives the Consistory or Session the power to control its membership to some extent.

In the making of a nomination it is a good practice to have each of the members of the Consistory or Session come to the meeting with his own list of preferences. This helps to assure that sufficient thought be given to the matter. It also is a good practice to read the whole list of eligible members to guarantee that no one be forgotten as the nomination is made.

If there be a sufficient number of available persons, it is to be recommended that the nomination contain not merely double the number of vacancies but even three or four times as many in order to give the congregation more choice.

The common practice of making known the number of votes each candidate receives at the time of the congregational meeting can be discarded with much profit to the church. Such information is not mentioned in the record of the election of office bearers in apostolic days. Better methods could be devised which would more closely approach the Scriptural method of casting the lot. If only the results of the election were announced, such as the persons who were chosen or the names between which the congregation must still decide—which is all that the congregation needs to know, that limitation of information would already be an improvement. It is to be recommended therefore that the congregation select a permanent confi-



dence committee to count the votes and to state only who were elected to office. The humiliation occasioned by a small vote, or the pride occasioned by a large one, does not promote the interests of the Church. And the thought of the publicity of congregational elections may very well be an unfavorable factor in the performance of an office bearer's work.

### RULES IN VOTING

Only communicant members, who are in good standing, should be permitted to vote.

Blank ballots should not be counted. One half of the votes cast plus one constitute a majority.

If the number of ballots does not agree with the number of qualified voters and this difference cannot be explained in a satisfactory way, the voting should be declared void by the chairman and the assembly should vote over again.

Votes that are brought in by letter should not be received readily; and if received, the signatures of the voters should be known to be genuine. They are to be counted only with the first ballot. Several denominations do not even allow voting by proxy.

In the event of a tie in voting for persons, it is preferable to vote again. Should the tie remain, the elder person may be regarded as elected or the lot may be cast to decide the matter.

If more persons receive a majority than are needed for the vacancies, then those having the greatest majority should be declared elected.

An objection against some aspect of the voting must be made at the same meeting wherein the voting takes place, and the clerk should record such objection. If the objection be not stated then, the objector forfeits the right of appeal.

The secret ballot should be used only in voting for persons.

#### VOTING BY WOMEN AND MINORS

The teaching of the apostle Paul, about women wearing a veil when they prophecy (1 Cor. 11), is based upon the fact that a veil was then the symbol of their inferiority to man. The wearing of a veil by women, which was a custom at the time, was honored by Paul because it symbolized a Scripture truth relative to the inferiority of the woman. That women, apart from prophecying, may not speak in the church in public gathering is the plain teaching of God's Word (cf. I Cor. 14:34, 35; I Tim. 2:11, 12). This prohibition is plain, positive, pointed, universal, and without ambiguity. The given passages even forbid them to ask questions in public gathering. Not as to her salvation but as to her position in the church, the keynote of Paul's teaching is that she is subordinate. This subordinate position he bases upon the primal law of creation "thy husband . . . shall rule over thee" (Gen. 3:16), which is universal and for all time. Added reasons for this subordination he sees also in the fact that "Adam was first formed," and that Eve was made "of the man," and also "for the man" (I Tim. 2:13; I Cor. 11:8, 9). Still another important reason for the subordination of women Paul ascribes to the fact that it was Eve who was deceived, not Adam (I Tim. 2:14; cf. Gen. 3:17). She who was later

upon the scene was the first to sin, and also the one to sin more grievously. Because her fall was greater, the sex she represented also fell deeper; and according to the inspired apostle she now occupies in the Church of Christ a subordinate position with respect to matters of authority. Paul says "I suffer not a woman . . . to usurp authority over the man" (I Tim. 2:12).

The question whether women should be given the privilege of the vote at congregational meetings hinges upon the question whether the exercise of that privilege is an exercise of authority. If the vote of the congregation be considered as only advisory, as some believe it is, then there can be no objection to women voting at congregational meetings. That this vote is not authoritative in Reformed and Presbyterian Churches, in the same sense as is the vote of the Consistory or Session, may be granted. But also it must be conceded that common opinion regards the vote of the congregational meeting as decisive. When the members of the congregation, together with the Consistory or Session, vote for a pastor or for members of the council, that vote stands. If the election within a Consistory or Session is an act of church government, then the participation in an election by the members of the congregation is an act of cooperating in church government. And that condemns the practice of women voting in congregational meetings.

Moreover, the denomination which grants to women the right to vote for office bearers will ere long find itself confronted by a movement advocating that they also be given the right to hold office. To withhold the latter privilege will be found to be difficult if the former privilege was

already granted. But the holding of office in the Church by women is contrary to the plain teaching of the Bible!

In one and in possibly more congregations of the Christian Reformed Church women suffrage is permitted. On matters of such vital importance denominations, however, cannot afford to allow churches to do as they please. After women suffrage was introduced in two congregations of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, its General Synod in 1930 ruled that this might not be continued. The reasons for the position taken were that voting at congregational meetings is not merely advice but an act of government, and that Scripture argues against it rather than for it. Both presbyterially-governed and independently-governed Churches of the seventeenth century refused to allow women suffrage.

The established Reformed Church of the Netherlands now allows women to vote at congregational meetings. This is now also permitted in various denominations of Scotland, Switzerland, Germany, Hungary, and America. The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. has had women suffrage as far back at least as 1822.

In Congregational-Christian Churches women also vote but these Churches have the rule that the age of 21 years must have been reached before the franchise may be exercised. There are other denominations also that have a minimum age limit. In Baptist churches rather generally every member of a church, regardless of age, sex, or spiritual maturity, is permitted to vote. Though in a few Baptist churches neither women nor minors vote; and though in a large number of them the children are not expected to vote on important matters; nevertheless they may not by rule be deprived of the franchise.

## QUESTIONS AS TO VOTING

## WHAT CONSTITUTES A QUORUM

In the case of a fixed body of which the number is determined, such as a Board, Consistory, Session, Vestry, or Synod, a quorum in the eyes of the law consists of a majority of that number—except in case the body itself has a rule to the contrary. In the absence of such a rule, when the number is not complete due to unwillingness to participate, departure, or death, the body may proceed upon the basis of the majority vote of those present.

In the case of a body composed of an indefinite number, such as a congregation, if the body itself have no rule in the matter and if the meeting be duly convened, the law regards those present as constituting a quorum even though they be but a minority of the whole body.

## MAJORITY CONSIDERATION FOR LARGE MINORITY

The purpose of voting in the Church is to know what is the will of Christ in any pending matter. In the designation of a choice or in the casting of a ballot Christ's will is supposed to come to expression. Voting is therefore a solemn responsibility calling for much thought, prayer, and consecration that only Christ's will be done.

Because fallible human agency must be employed in voting, the result is not infallible. It is unreliable to the extent that human deficiency and perversity enter. If no imperfections entered, voting would be always unanimous.

Good order in the Church requires that it be assumed that the majority give expression to the will of God. It is possible indeed that the minority are a more true expression of it. The spirit of truth often comes to expression in



the protest of the minority. The presence of a large minority therefore always calls for considerateness on the part of the majority. It should never ride roughshod over the feelings of the minority, especially not a large minority. At times the majority should rather waive its privilege than to carry its point. Among the adherents of independent polity the saying is current "You can't run a church on a majority."

An illustration of a commendable considerateness on the part of the majority is furnished by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in their calling of a minister. This Church has the rule that if it appears a large minority cannot be induced to concur in the call, then the presiding minister shall endeavor to persuade the congregation not to send the call and to arrange for another election. However, the small majority retains the right to insist upon the prosecution of the call.

#### DIFFICULT MATTERS

Questions that are likely to be seriously divisive should ordinarily not be brought to a vote until by patient and loving effort a greater unanimity be attained. A minority to be sure should not regularly determine the policy of a congregation or a denomination, but Christian courtesy calls for patience if there is likely to be earnest protest by a rather large part of the membership.

On questions of faith and piety a body should hesitate to vote. Questions of truth are not to be regulated by a "thus saith the majority" but by a "thus saith the Lord." Rather than to hurriedly vote on such matters, a body should first endeavor patiently to bring all to agreement as much as possible.

## CHAPTER TEN

# DISCIPLINE

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### IN THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

#### THE TIME OF THE APOSTLES

Since the many apostolic precepts requiring the use of discipline can be cited to better advantage later, the teaching of the New Testament about discipline is at this point confined to apostolic and congregational practice. The sternness of Paul is evident from these passages: "what will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod?" (I Cor. 4:21); "for I verily . . . have already as though I were present judged him . . . to deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh" (I Cor. 5:3, 5); "if I come again, I will not spare" (II Cor. 13:2); "whom I delivered unto Satan that they might be taught not to blaspheme" (I Tim. 1:20).

The membership of the congregation also participated in the exercise of discipline in New Testament times as appears from the following: "ye being gathered together, and my spirit . . . to deliver such a one" (I Cor. 5:4); "sufficient to such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the many" (II Cor. 2:6).

#### SEVERITY OF DISCIPLINE IN THE FIRST CENTURIES

In the first centuries after the apostles, discipline played

an inconceivably great part in the Christian communities. These were what they were largely because of the stress placed on discipline. Sins such as theft, adultery, murder, blasphemy, schism, heresy, and idolatry were called mortal. The punishment for these was excommunication, which deprived the erring member from the right of attending any church service, and from fellowship with the believers. Repentance shown by way of prayers, fastings, and almsdeeds was acknowledged, but the path to restoration was hard and long—all the way from one to twenty years. For idolatry there was even no pardon. One who had lapsed into idolatry, upon repentance, might again be received as a catechumen but not as a communicant; God might forgive him but the Church could not.

An excommunicated person who desired to be restored into the Church was subjected to grievous public humiliation as is seen most clearly in the system of penitent stations which developed about the beginning of the fourth century. Penitents were divided into four classes: the "mourners" who for a whole year had to stand begging for entrance just outside the church door, clad in mourning apparel; the "hearers" who had to stand for three years just inside the door where they could hear the sermon; the "kneelers" who could enter the church and take part in a kneeling posture; and the "co-standers" who stood with the rest of the congregation but who might not participate in the Lord's Supper. After these four stations were passed, the penitent, upon confession, was again received into the fellowship of the Church by way of the laying on of hands and a fellowship kiss.

## THE LACK OF DISCIPLINE TODAY

## THAT DISCIPLINE IS WANTING

In the State-supported church of Geneva, Switzerland, under the leadership of John Calvin, there was in the time of the Reformation stern discipline. In support of the church the civil authorities of Geneva applied disciplinary measures in a way that would be revolting to the modern mind. But in other places to which Calvinism spread there was no duplication of the fine discipline that prevailed in Geneva. Elsewhere the dependence of the Church upon the civil authorities tended to weaken discipline. Even in the established Reformed Church of the Netherlands, and as far back as the seventeenth century, there was justified complaint that discipline was seriously neglected. Since that time there has been everywhere in Reformed and Presbyterian circles comparatively little of really faithfully-applied discipline, and today there is even less than before.

There is no discipline now in the established Reformed Church of the Netherlands—not even as to the beliefs of the office bearers. From the established Church of England discipline had disappeared already more than a century ago. And that long ago it had already become all but absent from the Protestant Episcopal Church of this country. The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. does not even set a standard for the belief and creed of its communicant members. Belief in its doctrinal Standards is required only of its office bearers, and that with but very limited insistence. More than half a century ago already a minister of this Church wrote “the cases of discipline still reported in our Church statistics are the expulsion of members or more frequently the dropping of members in default of their proper answer to the citation of the Church. This default

is merely the manifestation of the contempt in which the claim of discipline is held."

Not much better than that is the discipline today of the Christian Reformed Church though it be regarded as one of the strictest of Churches. Its Classes from time to time must settle disputes between members at variance, and this may give the impression that discipline is exercised. Its Classes from time to time also approve the expulsion of members but these by their absence from church services for a long time have already in effect erased themselves, and they have manifested the contempt in which they held the claim of discipline. This Church also maintains its rules as to secret societies and unscriptural divorce. In the sense of formalities of that nature the Christian Reformed Church to be sure still exercises discipline. But discipline in its full, beautiful, and Scriptural sense also in this Church is well nigh absent. If the whole of discipline be compared to the care of the body from its slightest malady to its lowering in the grave, then in this Church, as no doubt in other Churches, it may be said that the part that is played by the doctor as the patient is about to die and the part that is played by the funeral director after death are still performed—but, on the whole, very little of all the other care that ought to precede. In fact, but comparatively few disciplinary funerals even are held; for, by permitting easy transference of membership to less strict denominations, this unpleasant task of burial is frequently left for other Churches to perform, or it is avoided by accepting the resignation of members under discipline.

#### REASONS FOR THE LACK OF DISCIPLINE

The lack of discipline in Protestant Churches today



should be viewed against the background of their having been originally State-supported Churches. The idea of the separation of Church and State was foreign to the times of the Reformation, and the civil authorities especially were insistent upon their union. But when all citizens are by law members of the Church, strict application of discipline is almost impossible. The Protestant Churches were therefore handicapped from the very start in applying discipline faithfully. Later, when segments of the established Churches broke away, these in independent denominations were, to be sure, free to exercise discipline. However, these Churches, because of their long associations with the established Churches previously, were not accustomed to strict discipline, and they tended to carry over into their new organizations the attitudes as to discipline which had prevailed in the established Churches.

The multiformity of Protestantism also undermines the faithful exercise of discipline. When denominations do not respect one another's discipline and welcome members who in other Churches are under censure, or when Churches dismiss members under discipline to other denominations in order to be rid of troublesome persons, or when a Church accepts the resignation of members under discipline, the whole fabric of Protestant discipline necessarily breaks down. That process is now rather nearly completed.

Another reason for the want of discipline is the incompetence of ministers because of their youth, inexperience, ignorance, and, still more, their indifference and "worldly" carefulness. One writer of half a century ago says in criticism of his fellow ministers "preachers, especially, are accustomed to treat ecclesiastical patients with plasters, and

ointments, and washings, and anointing with oil, and honeyed words, and soothing syrups, so that they cannot use the probe and the knife effectually in the few desperate cases that demand surgical operation."

In presbyterially-governed Churches the faithful exercise of discipline depends almost altogether upon the elders. The greater the want of discipline is in said Churches, the greater also is this an indictment against their elders. Many of them also are characterized by ignorance, indifference, and "worldly" carefulness. If they are subjected repeatedly to the vote of the people in order to be returned to or retained in office, this policy itself works against the faithful exercise of discipline by tempting elders to cater to the people.

The cause of ecclesiastical discipline suffers also because it is not prosecuted with sufficient vigor. The Bible says "because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11). People tend to lose respect for a disciplinary process that drags on almost interminably. In the exercise of discipline the virtue of patience should not be emphasized to the point where it becomes a vice.

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## THE NEED OF DISCIPLINE

### AS SEEN IN GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

As the maintenance of law and order is essential to the social structure, as training is essential in the family, as obedience is necessary in the school room and in the army,

so in the Church of Jesus Christ discipline is indispensable. Today there is a trend toward chaos in world conditions generally. It is now more important than ever that the Church be a beacon to the world pointing the way back to good order. The Church ought to be the most orderly society in the world. It is lamentable if the Church just now fails to maintain discipline faithfully.

The true preaching of the Word, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the faithful exercise of discipline are the three marks of the true Church; and the third of these is essential to the other two. Without discipline the light of the Truth is eclipsed, and that which is holy is profaned. As a three-legged stool cannot stand if one of its supports give way, so also the Church collapses if discipline is neglected. If the true doctrines be the soul of the Church, discipline constitutes its nerves and ligaments which bind the members together and keep each in his proper place. When the Church permits open defiance to the ordinances of Christ to pass without rebuke, and open abuse to remain without reform, it digs its own grave and becomes chargeable to its Lord for negligence toward a most solemn task.

They who neglect discipline, themselves also become responsible for the sins which they fail to check. The law of Moses says "thou shalt surely rebuke thy neighbor, and not bear sin because of him" (Lev. 19:17). This means that if we fail to reprove the sins of those with whom we are associated, we ourselves also must bear responsibility for their sins. To the same intent are these words in the New Testament, "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove them" (Eph. 5:11).

On three occasions Jesus gave to His disciples the power of the keys, saying "whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19; cf. Matt. 18:18 and John 20:23). The conferring of this power involves the sacred duty to employ it.

#### AS SEEN IN THE GREAT COMMISSION

Just before ascending to heaven Jesus gave the great commission "go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you" (Matt. 28:19, 20). The Church has sensed the importance of these words for mission work far better than it has grasped their significance for the organized churches. When people are converted through mission effort, the great commission has not yet been fully complied with. There remains the no less difficult obligation of "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you." And in this task there are again two distinct duties: the one, the duty of teaching all that Christ commanded; and the other, the duty of teaching to *observe* all His commands. The latter is a far greater task than the former. To teach a child what to do is easy compared to the task of training the child to do it; however, proper training includes the obligation of requiring obedience no less than the task of inculcating knowledge. Similarly, in the organized churches, the great commission requires not only the teaching of Christ's commandments but also the far more difficult obligation of training people to observe them. The Church should be especially occupied with this most difficult task of training

or disciplining its members. To neglect discipline is just as much a sin as to neglect mission work. To be unfaithful to the last part of the great commission is just as great a sin as to be unfaithful to the first part.

#### BIBLE REQUIRES REJECTION OF THOSE NOT PURE IN DOCTRINE

The Word of God leaves no room for leniency in the case of preachers or teachers who fail to bring the pure doctrines. This is clear from the strong language of the following texts: "for there are many unruly men, vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped . . . for which cause reprove them sharply that they may be sound in the faith" (Titus 1:10, 11, 13); "if anyone cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting, for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works" (II John 10, 11); "but though we or an angel from heaven should preach unto you any Gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema" (Gal. 1:8). In view of the large percentage of modernistic teachers and preachers of the present day, if these biblical precepts were literally complied with, this would result in a vast number of religious leaders being expelled after at most the second warning, in their having their mouths stopped, in their failure to receive even a greeting from God's people, and in their being anathematized by the Church.

#### BIBLE FORBIDS FELLOWSHIP WITH THOSE WHO SIN

The Word of God is very stern as it repeatedly forbids association with those who lead offensive lives. Jesus said



as to those who refuse to heed the admonition of the aggrieved person, the witnesses, and the church, "let him be unto thee as the Gentile and publican" (Matt. 18:17). As to those who do not pay attention to what God asks of them, the Bible says "if any man obeyeth not our word by this epistle, note that man, that ye have no company with him, to the end that he may be ashamed; and yet count him not as an enemy but admonish him as a brother" (II Thes. 3:14, 15). In the case of those who cause divisions and are occasions of stumbling, believers are told "turn away from them" (Rom. 16:17). As to those who hold the form of godliness but who have denied the power thereof, it is said "from these also turn away" (II Tim. 3:5). The apostle Paul says "withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which they received of us" (II Thes. 3:6). And in another place he exhorts "I wrote unto you not to keep company, if any man that is named a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one, not to eat . . . Put away the wicked man from among yourselves" (I Cor. 5:11, 13).

We are also told to "admonish the disorderly" (I Thes. 5:14), and "them that sin reprove in the sight of all that the rest also may be in fear" (I Tim. 5:20).

There is then according to the Word of God a great need of exercising discipline faithfully. How can anyone question this need? After Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead by God himself merely for having pretended to have given more than they actually gave, should there be any doubt as to God's desire to have practical religion kept pure by the pruning knife of discipline (cf. Acts 5:

1-11). When Ananias and Sapphira died "great fear came upon the whole church." The whole Church should still be filled with fear for God does not look on indifferently today as the religious husbandmen of his vineyard allow it to become all overgrown with nettles and briars.

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## THE SCOPE OF DISCIPLINE

### THE PURPOSE OF DISCIPLINE

The purpose of discipline is to maintain Christ's honor—it dishonors the King of the Church when in His spiritual kingdom there is no good order or when in His Church the members are allowed to live in public defiance of His commandments. The purpose of discipline is also to maintain the purity of the Church and its sacraments. And, finally, the purpose of discipline is also to chastise the sinner in order to bring him to repentance and thus to save him—it is not its purpose to punish the sinner for punishment belongs to the sphere of civil authority.

### THE DOMAIN OF ITS EXERCISE

In its final phases, ecclesiastical discipline refers to the withdrawing of the privileges of membership which were earlier conferred. Beyond the forfeiture of these outward privileges ecclesiastical discipline cannot go in the way of inflicting penalties. But to this point the Church should unhesitatingly go if the situation calls for it. It is strange that in actual practice there should be so much hesitation in applying the final phases of discipline. For the Church assuredly has the right as well as the duty to again withdraw the privileges which it once conferred.

But there is more, far more, to discipline than the final phases of it. It is most lamentable that to the popular mind, and even to the office bearers of the Church, the word "discipline" commonly connotes only the idea of a cutting-off process. That is however not even the fundamental idea of discipline. The basic meaning of discipline is to train. The word discipline and the word disciple not only appear to be similar but they are also as to their basic meaning similar. Discipline is the training that is suited to a disciple. It includes instruction, training, admonition, and correction, as well as excommunication. In fact discipline consists mostly of training and correction. It is the teaching of Christ's disciples "to observe all things whatsoever" Christ commanded them as He told the apostles to do in the great commission. It is the training of His disciples in order to develop their powers and faculties. It is not only negative in its character but also positive. It applies not only to the correction of error but also to the fostering of Christian virtue.<sup>1</sup>

Not only the pastor but also the other religious leaders of a church have the calling to exercise discipline in its broader sense. They should ever be on the alert to train or discipline the members intrusted to their care. The edification of the body of Christ is their solemn obligation. Constantly they should be exhorting to holy living. If members neglect to attend the religious services faithfully, and the elders or other religious leaders fail to admonish them, these religious leaders are neglecting to exercise discipline. The use of the Sabbath day in other ways than God intended, the frequenting of places where God's people do not belong, the association with persons who are not of God's people, the speaking in a manner that ill becomes

a follower of Christ, and any other departure from a holy walk calls for correction by the elders and other religious leaders of a church. If they fail in this, they are neglecting to apply discipline faithfully.

Faithful oversight of a congregation prevents many evils which otherwise afflict a church through negligence. It is better constantly to watch the whole flock carefully than to have to spend time later in trying to reclaim the wandering. A church as well as a house is kept well-ordered only through constant effort. Elders have their opinion about a housekeeper who allows the dirt and the filth to accumulate until it is a stench to the nostrils. They should also consider how their own congregational house looks to the discerning and exacting eye of their Lord.

#### THE SUBJECTS OF DISCIPLINE

In Reformed circles children have ever been regarded as members of the Church, and as members of it they are subject to its discipline. To be sure, discipline in their case must necessarily be only partial since they are not yet members in the full sense of the word. Because children do not have the right to vote or to attend the Lord's Supper, these privileges of course cannot be taken from them. Discipline of children is limited to warning, exhortation, reproof, and erasure. But these, according to Reformed writers, also belong to discipline.

The Christian Reformed Church has the rule that baptized members, who have come to maturity without having made confession of faith, should be erased; but this rule is a dead letter. The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, which also have this rule, designate the thirtieth year

as the ultimate limit to which the names of such baptized members should be kept upon the records; but said Churches are also loathe to apply their rule. It however should be applied for the Church cannot acknowledge a third type of membership, besides children and communicant members—a position that was taken already as far back as the national Synod of the Netherlands in 1578. The Netherlands church in London in the sixteenth century, which was ministered unto by a' Lasco, severed the relationship of such adult baptized members at the age of twenty. The established Reformed Church of the Netherlands did not sever that relationship formally but merely regarded such baptized members as having really no longer membership in the Church. Because of its dependence on the government said Church could not formally sever them as a' Lasco did in his independent church in London. However the independent Churches of our day are free to do what also consistency requires. And if a church announce that in the case of those below the age of twenty, such exclusion shall take place at the age of twenty-five (if no confession be made in the meanwhile), and that it will take place five years from the date of announcement in the case of those above twenty, there should be no great difficulty in applying the good rule in question. In any event the membership papers of adult baptized persons should not be transferred or received, as also the rule of the Christian Reformed Church forbids—except they promise to become communicant members by way of attendance at catechism and confession.

The Christian Reformed Church has the rule that before a Consistory may proceed to the exclusion of an unfaithful baptized member an announcement without the name shall



be made to the congregation, together with an exhortation for intercession, and that thereupon the advice of the Classis must be sought. The exclusion of such a person is effected by announcing to the congregation, and informing said person, that because of persistent unfaithfulness the former relationship to the congregation has ceased.

The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands and the Christian Reformed Church of this country judge that a person can no longer be the object of ecclesiastical discipline if he persists in the resignation of his membership. It is said that, when members resign, discipline must cease because it concerns only the members of the Church. The error in this reasoning lies in the assumption that the Church should accept such resignations. The Church ought not to be regarded simply as a society whereof people become members by their own volition. In Reformed and Presbyterian Churches it is not believed that people become members by a voluntary act but by an act of God consummated already at birth in the case of most of the members. And that relationship should not be severed except by an act of the Church. In a Reformed or Presbyterian Church it should not be a person's privilege to resign when he pleases. Said Churches may learn from the judicial procedure of an army. A soldier who has committed a crime cannot leave the army in order to escape its discipline—not even in case he became united to the army by way of a voluntary enlistment. The said Churches may also learn from a Congregationalist who a quarter of a century ago wrote that the name of a person should not “be dropped while charges against him are pending; to drop his name, even at his own request, under charges, would be the perversion of discipline.”

## DISCIPLINARY MATTERS

Any sin is censurable which has *one or more* of the following characteristics: (1) that it is public—private sins also are public sins after the rule in Matthew 18 has been followed and the council has been informed; (2) that it causes offence, which means that it tends to lead others into sin; (3) that it is accompanied by impenitence.

Some sins of omission for which discipline is proper are the following: failure to have the children baptized or attend catechism, failure to attend religious services or the Lord's Supper, failure to become reconciled with parties at variance, and failure to support the church. Sins of commission that are censurable include the following: false doctrine or heresy, schism, blasphemy, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, unnecessary Sunday labor, habitual drunkenness, unscriptural divorce followed by unlawful remarriage, and prolonged marital separation.

Laws against blasphemy are still found on the statute books of fourteen States, including Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Blasphemy is defined as open denial of God; questioning the legitimacy of Christ; profane or insolent utterances against the virgin mother, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or the Scriptures.

The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. has the rule that it is "a matter of discipline for church members to be supporters and attendants in other Churches not of our communion, while absenting themselves from or refusing to support the church to which they belong." The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands have ruled that such persons, who desire to remain affiliated with the church which they

have forsaken, shall be disciplined to the point of excommunication—not however without being labored with very patiently and diligently. But in the case of persons who in that way leave their own Church due to lack of denominational consciousness, and who attend other Reformed Churches, said denomination rules that they shall be suspended from the Lord's Supper but not excommunicated if the Form for that purpose can not well be applied to them.

Membership in secret societies is censurable in the Christian Reformed Church of this country and in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other States, is vigorously opposed to all secret societies. The Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod forbids pastors to be members of secret societies and requires them to urge affiliated members to sever such relationship.

The Christian Reformed Church of this country and the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands forbid as to the Lord's Day "all servile work, except those which charity or present necessity require, and also all such recreations as interfere with worship." There are said to be 450 volumes on the Sabbath in the Alfred University, a seventh-day Baptist institution, located at Alfred, New York.

#### FORBIDDEN MARRIAGES

In the Old Testament marriage is forbidden with one's mother or stepmother, sister or half-sister, granddaughter, aunt (also if not a blood relative), daughter-in-law, and brother's wife (except she have no children).

The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands have ruled

that in the case of marriage with a nephew or niece of one's deceased partner such marriage should be condemned and warned against, the persons involved should not hold office, and they should confess their sin as should also the one who solemnized the marriage. The Christian Reformed Church of this country condemns such a marriage as a shameful sin.

As to Levirate marriage, or marriage with a deceased brother's wife, the Christian Reformed Church leaves the various cases to the discretion of the Consistories. The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands have ruled that Levirate marriage cannot from Scripture be clearly proven to be incest, and that it is not censurable. The government of the Netherlands forbids it by statute; however by special permission such marriage may be allowed, and it usually is permitted when this is requested.

#### DIVORCE AND SEPARATION

As to divorce for reasons other than adultery, followed by remarriage while the former partner still lives, the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands hold the following position: such divorce must be viewed as sin but to require abstinence from remarriage thereupon has no sufficient support in Scripture; censure must be applied in the case of such divorce and remarriage but the Church can require only confession and proof of penitence when such parties wish to affiliate with it. In this position the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands have adopted the stand of their government on divorce. It should be borne in mind that the Netherlands State laws on marriage and divorce are based upon a Christian foundation. How strict these

laws are may be seen for example in the fact that they also forbid marriage with a deceased brother's wife. The said Reformed Churches, appreciating the attitude of their government on marriage and divorce, try to conform to its divorce laws.

The civil law of Scotland forbids a person to marry one with whom the sentence of divorce says adultery was committed, and the established Church of Scotland forbids its ministers to marry a person divorced for adultery.

The Christian Reformed Church of this country has the rule that a member who obtained a divorce on grounds other than adultery must repent of such divorce, and not marry again as long as the other party lives—not even after the other party has married again. If an unscripturally-divorced person does marry again, he must live separately from the second mate or be deprived of membership. One who commits adultery and is on that account divorced may not marry again in said Church even after the innocent party has married again. If such a one does however marry again while the innocent party still lives, he is to be deprived of membership. The Christian Reformed Church therefore does not permit membership to continue in the case of a person who obtains an unscriptural divorce, marries thereupon while the former partner still lives, and insists upon living with the second mate. However, said Church does accept into its membership persons who committed the sins of unscriptural divorce and unlawful remarriage, while in a state of ignorance as to the gravity of these sins, if they are truly repentent for having committed those sins.

It is sometimes maintained that the Church may not



bar those who are unscripturally divorced and unlawfully remarried if they are repentant; for, it is said, the Church must have a Gospel also for them. The Gospel of forgiveness therefore seems to call for a different policy as to divorce than the rule of Jesus about adultery (Matt. 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11, 12; Luke 16:18). What should the Church do when two conflicting policies *seem* to be required? It is instructive to ask what the Churches do, what at least Reformed denominations do, if there be apparently conflicting doctrines. On matters of doctrine Reformed Churches accept the Word of God just as it is—leaving the seeming inconsistencies to God. As they do in doctrine they should do also in polity. The explicit teaching of Jesus as to adultery may not be ignored in order to comply with what seems to be the implication of the Gospel of forgiveness. While the Church should exclude from membership in the visible Church the divorced persons under consideration, it should however at the same time admit that God may indeed give entrance into the Church invisible. In the primitive Church there was a similar attitude with respect to those who fell back into idolatry and thereupon desired to be received again into the Church. The early Church allowed such persons to be catechumens but they refused to receive them back as communicant members. It was held that God might forgive such persons but the Church could not.

In the case of the guilty party or parties in a somewhat prolonged separation between a man and his wife it is proper to require abstinence from the Lord's Supper. They should be urged to live together again and the sin should be confessed.

The Christian Reformed Church does not regard wilful

separation as a biblical ground for divorce. On this question the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands have refused to take a stand. The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. regards such wilful desertion, as can in no way be remedied by the Church or civil magistrate, as a sufficient ground for divorce.

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### PROCEDURE IN DISCIPLINING

#### IF SIN IS SECRET, MATTHEW 18 TO BE FOLLOWED FIRST

A secret sin has the following characteristics: (1) it is a sin committed in secret, or if committed publicly, its commitment has not become generally known to the members of the church; (2) it has not given general offense because it is not generally known; (3) if it is known by a few, these maintain silence.

The procedure in the case of secret sins Jesus himself gave. "And if thy brother sin against thee, go, show him his fault between thee and him alone; if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother; but if he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more, that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established; and if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church, and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican" (Matt. 18:15-17). This rule shows that discipline begins with the members of the church. They must initiate discipline and not wait for the Consistory or Session to act first.

The rule of Matthew 18 requires that the one, against whom the sin is committed, go to the transgressor. How-

ever, the guilty one also has the duty to go first to the party against whom he has sinned, as may be learned from the Lord's own words in Matt. 5:23, 24. "If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." Both the wrongdoer and the wronged have the duty of initiating the process of reconciliation; and, in an ideal situation, they would meet one another in their desire to get the matter out of the way. This is as it should be. If in a personal disagreement a conciliatory spirit is found on both sides, there is little difficulty in effecting a reconciliation. However, when one side manifests an un-Christian spirit and refuses to be guided by the law of Christ, then it is difficult to reconcile the parties at variance.

Whether one will "gain" the brother who has trespassed depends largely upon the manner in which one approaches him. One who manifests a kind and conciliatory spirit is likely to succeed; while one who shows a revengeful, harsh, and haughty spirit is almost sure to fail. In Christian discipline in all its phases we are nothing without love.

The Christian Reformed Church holds that it is censurable for a member to live in an unreconciled attitude toward another while refusing at the same time to act according to Matthew 18. The Reformed Church in America has the rule that persons who present charges to the Consistory, without having taken the steps prescribed in Matthew 18, shall be considered guilty of an offense against the peace and order of the church and shall be censured accordingly.

## THE COUNCIL CONSIDERS PUBLIC SINS

A public sin, which the Consistory or Session is called upon to consider, has *one or more* of the following characteristics: (1) although originally secret, it becomes known to the Consistory or Session through an informant; (2) it becomes public through rumor, arrest, newspapers, etc.; (3) having been committed publicly, it is known to the members generally.

When a charge is about to be entertained or when it is being considered by the Consistory or Session, the latter do well to bear in mind the precautionary rules which several denominations have adopted. As to the character of the accuser the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and the Reformed Church in America somewhat similarly, have the rule that "great caution ought to be exercised in receiving accusations from any person who is known to indulge a malignant spirit toward the accused . . . or who is known to be litigious, rash, or highly imprudent." The said Presbyterian Church rules that the accuser becomes himself subject to discipline on the ground of slander if he fails to show reasonable grounds for his charge; and he must be warned of this before presenting charges. The Reformed Church in America rules that "the testimony of more than one witness is required to establish an accusation against any member."

The aforesaid Presbyterian Church has the rule that "every charge must be presented . . . in writing, and must set forth the alleged offense with the specifications of the facts relied upon to sustain the charge. Each specification shall declare, as far as possible, the time, place, and circumstances of the commission of the alleged offense, and

shall be accompanied with the names of the witnesses.”

The same Presbyterian Church warns its ecclesiastical bodies to consider when hearing witnesses that “not every person is competent and not every competent person is credible as a witness.” This creditability “may be affected by relationship to either of the parties; by interest in the result of the trial; by want of proper age; by weakness of understanding; by infamy or malignity of character; . . . by general rashness or indiscretion . . .”

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church requires, when an ecclesiastical body is about to sit in a judicial capacity upon a case, that the chairman shall announce that they are to sit in such capacity and that he shall exhort the members to bear in mind their solemn duty to subordinate all human judgments to the Word of God. This announcement and exhortation must be repeated at the opening of each session of the trial.

A Consistory or Session should consider whether the trespass bears rather the character of a weakness or of a criminal character. If it appear to be rather a weakness, the trespass should receive milder treatment. But if it appear to have been committed determinedly and hard-heartedly, discipline should be applied with rigor in order that the sinner be ashamed.

After a Consistory or Session has assured itself that a charge is well founded, it should admonish the transgressor, and that repeatedly over a period of time. It should bestow disciplinary care upon him with love, with firmness, and with perseverance.

#### SILENT CENSURE (MINOR EXCOMMUNICATION)

If the person, upon whom the Consistory or Session has



labored, refuses to heed its admonition, suspension from the Lord's Supper should follow, together with the loss of franchise. Not the sin of the transgressor as such but his obstinacy becomes the ground of censure. Suspension from the Lord's Supper is called silent censure because it should be kept as secret as possible. Secrecy is maintained in order to spare the party in question, in harmony with the direction of Jesus' rule in Matthew 18. This silent censure is known also as "minor excommunication" or the lesser excommunication. While it is maintained, the Consistory or Session should continue to labor with the party in question.

Sometimes a confession, judged to be sincere, may come just before the celebration of the Lord's Supper (so that the discipline of suspension is uncalled for); when, however, there is still great feeling on the matter in the congregation. Sometimes there may be reason for suspecting guilt but no sufficient time before the Lord's Supper to ascertain the point definitely. In cases of that nature the Consistory or Session may tell the person in question to refrain from participating in the celebration of the Lord's Supper near at hand. Such temporary suspension does not have a disciplinary character. It is administered in view of the need to guard the sanctity of the Lord's Table and to avoid offense.

#### IF THE SINNER REPENTS

The rules of the Christian Reformed Church of this country, and those of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, stipulate that reconciliation shall take place only "upon sufficient evidence of repentance." There must be "repentance"; there must moreover be "evidence of re-

pentance"; and in addition there must be "sufficient evidence of repentance." It is wrong to accept every profession at face value, and to lift the censure at once and completely. Every profession of sorrow, or every promise of amendment, or even a partial reformation should not be considered sufficient reason for lifting the censure. Even though there be no heartfelt sorrow, a confession may be made only to settle the matter outwardly. If there be reason to doubt the word of the transgressor, a Consistory or Session should wait with the lifting of the censure till it can discern "sufficient evidence of repentance." In view of the general practice in the churches this warning is far from superfluous.

A confession should contain an acknowledgment of having committed the sin with which one is charged, and also a promise that one, with the gracious help of God, will henceforth avoid such sin and live uprightly before God.

A confession before the Consistory or Session is really a confession before the church inasmuch as they represent the church. Whether a public confession of a sin should be made by the erring member before the congregation, or whether a public announcement should be made of the sin that was confessed before the council, depends on: (1) whether the discipline has proceeded beyond the phase of silent censure; (2) what is most to God's honor; (3) what is most to the edification of the church; and (4) what is most beneficial for the spiritual good of the sinner. The humiliation of the sinner may never be an end in itself but only a means to an end.

Accordingly as there appears to be need, the announcement of a confession before the Consistory or Session may

be made to the congregation at once, or at a later date, or omitted altogether.

In announcements specific details should be avoided but it ought to be stated what the particular commandment is which was transgressed.

#### PUBLIC CENSURE (MAJOR EXCOMMUNICATION)

Continued obstinacy on the part of the sinner leads from silent to public censure or major excommunication. In the Christian Reformed Church of this country and in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands this public censure involves also three public announcements concerning the sinner, which are separated by irregular intervals, and between which the elders continue to labor with the transgressor.

In the first announcement to the congregation the general character of the sin, the care bestowed upon the sinner, and his obstinacy are stated, but not the name; and the congregation is exhorted to pray on his behalf. Before the second announcement may be made the approval of the Classis must be obtained. The second announcement differs from the first by the addition of the name. The third differs from the second by the addition of the date of excommunication. When that date arrives, the excommunication takes place with a prescribed Form.

In pronouncing the judgments of its discipline the Church is simply declaring what it believes to be the will of Christ in the matter. In excommunication the Church is merely acting according to its views of how Christ would have it do. If the Church should err and interpret the mind

of Christ amiss, its sentence will not carry with it any judgment or spiritual efficacy. One need not view the excommunicated person as already lost, nor cease to pray on his behalf, nor prescribe limits to the mercy of God who can change even the hardest of hearts.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# VARIOUS QUESTIONS ON CHURCH POLITY

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### WHICH BIBLE VERSION PREFERABLE

#### THE MAKING OF THE AUTHORIZED VERSION

In the time of the Reformation Puritan dissatisfaction with the existing versions of the day led to the making of the Authorized Version. King James I appointed the forty-seven scholars who did the work. They were divided into six companies, to each of which a portion of the Bible was assigned. The work was begun in 1607, and it took about two-and-a-half years. The Authorized Version appeared in 1611. It never was authorized in any ecclesiastical or civil court so far as is known. The Authorized Version was attacked sharply at first, and it became commonly accepted only gradually.

The Authorized Version is not really a translation but a revision of the Bishops Bible, which was a revision of the Great Bible, and this in turn a revision of the translations of Coverdale and Tyndale.

The scholars who made the Authorized Version used no documentary sources so far as is known. The text in the editions used by them was derived from the late cursive manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

#### THE MAKING OF THE REVISED VERSION

Fully three-quarter century ago the first step toward



the making of the Revised Version was taken in the established Church of England. Scholars of said Church, and of five other denominations in England, had a part in this work. The American scholars that took part in it represented nine denominations in America.

The English scholars numbered more than fifty. These were divided into two companies. From 23 to 35 worked on the Old Testament, and from 24 to 28 on the New. The American scholars numbered 34 at the outset and 23 at the close of the work. They also, working independently in America, were divided into an Old Testament and a New Testament company. At the outset the former numbered 15, the latter 19.

Work was begun in England in 1870, and two years later in America. The New Testament was finished in 1880, and the Old Testament in 1884.

The work in America was begun at the request of the English committee. Results of the work were exchanged across the sea. The English Revised Version of the New Testament appeared in 1881, and that of the Old Testament in 1885. In this edition a considerable part of the American preferences were published only in the Appendix. The American Committee had agreed not to put out an American Version for fourteen years. Hence the American Standard Version did not appear till 1901.

On any given portion of the Authorized Version only about 8 scholars labored, while in the case of the Revised Version there were about 42. On the Authorized Version those few scholars worked but  $2\frac{1}{2}$  years, while in the case of the Revised Version those many scholars labored from

10 to 14 years. Moreover, in the case of the Revised Version, they could make use of all the documentary sources found since the Authorized Version was made.

## THE LORD'S SUPPER

### THE COMMUNICANTS

Since one who partakes at the Lord's Table, according to Scripture, must be able "to discern the Lord's body" (I Cor. 11:29), and a certain degree of knowledge is necessary in order to do that, Consistories and Sessions are in duty bound to insist on adequate knowledge in examining applicants for communicant membership. One who cannot discern the Lord's body incurs the divine displeasure if he partakes (I Cor. 11:30), and the Consistory or Session which makes possible such participation becomes co-responsible for such sin.

In conducting an examination of such as desire to become communicant members, stress should be placed not on knowledge as such but on knowledge as appropriated and applied. The object is not to give them an opportunity to show what they know but to have them express what they really believe, how they feel as to Scripture truths, and how they purpose to live.

It is the practice in the Christian Reformed Church, in the case of those who wish to become communicant members, to ask a considerable number of questions following the outline of Scripture truth as presented in the Heidelberg Catechism. A specific question that is always asked is whether the applicant is a member of a secret society

since such persons are not permitted to become communicants. Another specific question that is always asked is the attitude and practice as to such worldly pleasures as theatre and movie attendance, dancing, and card playing. Those who are not resolved to lead the life of Christian separation are not permitted to become communicant members.

In the earlier history of Presbyterian Churches it was the practice in many churches to forbid a member to participate at the Lord's Table who had not previously been questioned as to his spiritual state. The minister or elders, during the week preceding communion, left metal tokens with the accepted communicants and they were expected to present these tokens before receiving the elements.

In the Christian Reformed Church a preparatory sermon is preached the Sunday preceding communion, and an after-communion sermon in the second service on communion Sunday. In said Church it is also customary to require of guests of other churches within the denomination that they first ask the Consistory for the privilege of participating if this is desired. In this way the office bearers are recognized whose duty it is to guard the sanctity of the Lord's Supper.

In said Church it is not permissible for the pastor to say to the audience that all who wish to partake may do so (open communion); nor to say that all, who are members in good and regular standing in other Churches and who wish to partake, are invited to do so (conditional open communion). Such an invitation leaves the individual to be the sole judge in the matter, and in that way one altogether unworthy may approach the Lord's Table. The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands and the Evangelical

Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other States, are also opposed to open communion.

They who abstain from the Lord's Table because they find some fault with the Consistory or Session, should consider that such abstention—in order to rectify a supposed error—is likely an adding of error to error. For it is disobedience to the Lord's precept to partake of the elements. It may with reason be asked whether such a person, who fails to bring a formal grievance against the council, does not become an object of discipline because of his unwillingness to become reconciled.

A Consistory or Session should be very reluctant to postpone the celebration of the Lord's Supper because of some disturbance in the congregation.

#### THE ADMINISTRATION

If the cup is passed through all the pews, it is almost impossible in most churches to observe who partakes, and so the sanctity of the Lord's Table is jeopardized. There is a real advantage in requiring communicants to sit in a limited area of the church edifice. If they must arise to go there, that also has value as an act of profession.

The Netherlands Synod of Dort, 1618-'19, required that the reading of the Form and the prayer should take place while the minister stands before the Communion Table. The breaking of the bread and the pouring of the wine are acts of distinctly symbolic value. In the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands and in the Christian Reformed Church of this country it is customary to read a portion of Scripture at the time of the administration, and to sing as the

congregation approaches or departs from the Lord's Table (in those churches wherein the communicants do not remain seated).

Both of the aforesaid Churches take up an offering for the poor at the time the Lord's Supper is observed. In the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. an offering for the poor is also received but the offering in part goes to defray the cost of the elements.

If a long Form is used, many churches read it only in part at the second communion service, or not at all. In that case those, who were not present at the first service, lose something essential in participating. If a council can get all the communicants to attend in one service, it should do so.

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## DISTURBANCE OF A RELIGIOUS MEETING

Every religious meeting enjoys the protection of the law against wilful disturbance, regardless of the number present, the form of organization, or the place of meeting. A gathering in a house or school or even under the open sky is protected as well as one held in a church edifice. Even a group of people not formally organized, having no distinctive name, or composed of persons belonging to various denominations, is protected by law.

The law is concerned only with wilful intent to disturb, as in cases like the following: interrupting the sermon, the observance of the Lord's Supper, or one leading in prayer; rowdiness; annoyance of the worshippers by making grimaces or unnecessary noise either within or without the place of meeting.



It may be necessary to lay hands on a disturber and remove him out of the audience—also if the disturbance be not wilful. If want of conformity to the regulations of a church causes disturbance, a person may be removed forcefully after his refusal to leave upon request. The office bearers, whose duty it is to preserve order, are the most natural ones to effect such removal. However, the pastor, the custodian, or even one of the common members, may do so.

It is well to bear in mind that the cause of religion is often served best by permitting an offense to pass without resort to force or judicial process.

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## CHURCH BUILDINGS

### THE TRUSTEES OF A CHURCH

It is advisable that a church obtain a copy of the State's laws on churches, especially those as to church organization. These can generally be obtained from the secretary of the State who is located in the capital.

Only the trustees of a church can represent it in making contracts. A congregation is not bound by the decision of its trustees beyond the authority granted them—except it subsequently ratify their decision. This ratification must be made with full knowledge of all the important factors that bear upon the matter.

The action of the trustees is legal only if made in an official meeting. At any meeting a quorum must be present to take lawful action. If a special meeting be called, all

the trustees must be informed sufficiently early as to the purpose of convening it. The discussion and deliberation of important matters should be confined to the official meetings. No trustee should be given reason to feel that the matter was in effect already settled privately before the body met.

#### MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENTS

It is advisable that the members of the Consistory, Session, or Board, do not themselves perform the repair work on the church buildings. If they do, the work is likely to be inferior to that which can be done by those skilled in the trades. If they do, and the work be unsatisfactory, it is in practice very difficult for others to criticize it and obtain improvement. The members of a building committee should only attend to it that the work be done, and that it be done well. If even the whole congregation can not afford to pay for the labor, the few members on the building committee can not alone afford to do it gratis. Such work done by them gratis is not evidence of congregational strength but of weakness. In a well-ordered congregation the wherewithal that is needed for repair is either present or it is readily obtainable from the general membership.

It is not advisable that repair on the parsonage be made only at the suggestion of its occupants. The building committee should regularly investigate as to the need of repair, and judge objectively. Repairs should not be made upon the basis of whether the minister is new, whether the attitude to him is favorable, and whether he has the courage to suggest improvements. If these conditions do not prevail, necessary repairs and improvements should nevertheless be made.

## THE COUNCIL OF A VACANT CHURCH

In the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands and in the Christian Reformed Church of this country it is customary that the Consistory of a vacant congregation meets without the presence of a pastor—even in important meetings such as those wherein a nomination is made for the calling of a minister. Until about 1885 this was also true of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., although even previous to that time some Presbyteries required the presence of a moderator. Because many vacant churches at the time filled their pulpits with ministers who did not meet with the approval of the denomination generally, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. made it a rule that in vacant churches a minister must preside when the Session meets. An exception to this may be made only in case great distance makes it impossible to secure a minister. Also in the Reformed Church in America it is required that a counselor of a vacant church have supervision of all the proceedings of a Consistory. The Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod requires that a vacant church elect a vice pastor who has the duties and responsibilities of a regular pastor during the vacancy.

The practice of these last-named Churches is proper. Presbyterian church polity calls for the union of both ministers and elders in all the governing assemblies. Both are present in Classes or Presbyteries, and in General Synods or Assemblies. The only exception to this is in the vacant churches of a few denominations. The practice of the Christian Reformed Church is therefore anomalous. The elders and deacons of its vacant churches in their meeting alone have a privilege which even the ministers

do not have, for there is of course no official meeting of only ministers in said Church.

## MARRIAGE CEREMONIES

### MARRIAGES PROHIBITED BY LAW

Of all the marriages that are contracted in the United States over three-fourths are performed by ministers. It is important that ministers be aware of it that there are several legal impediments to marriage. These concern a minimum age limit, low mentality, prior or present marriage, and consanguinity. Some States forbid marriage within, but not including, the fourth degree; others include the fourth degree. Degrees are reckoned by counting, from the one side, up to a common parent, and then down the other side to the party in question.

### MINISTER AS A PUBLIC OFFICER IN MARRIAGE CEREMONY

In England a minister is a public officer for most every purpose, but in America he acts as such only in contracting a marriage. In performing this ceremony a minister exercises authority conferred upon him by the State. Though he have in mind only a religious ceremony, a valid civil marriage nevertheless results. A minister in this work is a public officer as well as is a justice of the peace.

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## MEMBERSHIP TRANSFERS AND RECORDS

### TRANSFER OF MEMBERSHIP

It is customary in many Churches to record the date of

birth, baptism, and public profession of faith, but not to pass on this information in case an adult member moves. Why should not the Transfer of Membership contain these items? They would help the office bearers of the church, which the member joins, to know him. This information ought not to remain buried in the church he left.

In the Christian Reformed Church a letter of dismission may not be granted to one who requests it on account of grievances against other members of the same congregation. Such disagreements must first be removed.

In Reformed Churches a Transfer of Membership is regarded as strictly in proper use only among the churches of a denomination. A Consistory or Session that gives a Transfer of Membership to one who wishes to join another denomination, by that very act encourages disregard of denominational loyalty. It is proper, when a person wishes to affiliate with another denomination, to give merely a testimonial to the effect that up to the time of dismission the member was in regular standing and that his membership is terminated at his own request. Baptists also recommend this procedure.

In case of transfer of membership within The Methodist Church receipt of the Transfer must be acknowledged.

#### DAILY MEMBERSHIP RECORD

A sample page of a daily membership record follows for the convenience of those who must keep the membership book up-to-date either temporarily or regularly. Entries into the membership book need be made only now and then; and when they are, this is indicated on the daily record by the letter E. The plus or minus sign before the



name signifies whether it is an addition or a subtraction. In several respects a daily record is of much value.

Name	Birth	Bapt.	Entered	What	To Or From, Etc.	Fami- lies	Com- munic.	Indi- viduals	Date
—Kol, Jim			E	Comm.	Lee St.	113	257	593	2/4/47
+Vis, John			E	Comm.	Oak Pk.	113	256	592	2/4/47
+Vis, Mrs. J.			E	Bapt.	Oak Pk.	114	257	593	2/4/47
+Vis, Mary	7/2/35	8/9/35	E	Bapt.	Oak Pk.	114	257	594	2/4/47
+Lamb, Wm.			E	Comm.	Rusk	114	258	595	2/9/47
+Kerr, John	2/1/45	3/3/45		Bapt.	Baptism	114	258	596	
+Doll, Jane	3/8/45	3/3/45		Bapt.	Baptism	114	258	597	
—Day, Henry				Comm.	Zeel. I	113	257	598	3/5/47
—Day, Mrs. H.				Comm.	Zeel. I	113	256	597	3/5/47
—Day, Bert				Bapt.	Zeel. I	113	256	596	3/5/47
—Day, Jean				Bapt.	Zeel. I	113	256	595	3/5/47
+Haan, Angie				Comm.	Confess.	113	257	594	3/5/47
—Dane, Peter				Bapt.	Erasure	113	257	594	3/7/47
—Bell, Cora				Bapt.	Death	113	257	593	3/7/47
							257	592	3/9/47





## CHAPTER TWELVE

# CHURCH STATISTICS AND NOTES

### ALL THE CHURCHES IN THE UNITED STATES

Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Total Member- ship
Adventist Bodies:			
Advent Christian Church....	1944	437	30,547
Church of God (Adventist) ..	1940	79	5,295
Life of Advent Union.....	1944	5	288
Seventh Day Adventists.....	1944	2,531	194,832
Primitive Advent Christian Church .....	1936	14	538
African Orthodox Church.....	1942	32	5,200
Amana Church Society.....	1944	7	880
American Ethical Union.....	1944	6	2,875
American Rescue Workers.....	1942	4	300
Apostolic Overcoming Holy			
Church of God.....	1942	200	8,000
American Orthodox Church in			
America .....	1936	37	18,787
*Assemblies of God.....	1944	5,055	227,349
Assyrian Jacobite Apostolic			
Church .....	1936	4	3,100
Bahai Faith .....	'36-'42	88	4,489
Baptist Bodies:			
**Northern Baptist Conven- tion .....	1944	7,348	1,555,914

Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Total Member- ship
Southern Baptist Convention.	1944	25,965	5,667,926
**National Baptist Conven- tion U.S.A., Inc.....	1944	24,460	4,021,618
National Baptist Convention of America .....	1944	7,286	2,352,339
American Baptist Association.	1936	1,064	115,022
Christian Unity Baptist Asso- ciation .....	1944	10	418
Colored Primitive Baptists...	1936	1,009	43,897
Duck River (and Kindred) Associations of Baptists...	1936	91	7,951
Evangelical Baptist Church, Inc. ....	1942	4	400
*Free Will Baptists.....	1940	1,102	118,871
General Baptists .....	1942	580	39,600
*General Six-Principle Bap- tists .....	1944	3	280
Independent Baptist Church of America .....	1936	8	129
National Baptist Evangelical Life and Soul Saving As- sembly of U.S.A.....	1944	451	59,743
Primitive Baptists .....	1936	1,726	69,157
Regular Baptists .....	1936	266	17,186
General Association of Regu- lar Baptist Churches, North .....	1936	84	22,345
Separate Baptists .....	1944	90	6,490
**Seventh Day Baptists.....	1944	64	6,581



Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Total Member- ship
Seventh Day Baptists (Ger- man, 1728) .....	1942	2	125
Two Seed in the Spirit Pre- destinarian Baptists.....	1936	16	201
United American Free Will Baptist Church .....	1944	350	75,000
United Baptists .....	1936	277	27,000
Bible Protestant Church.....	1944	36	2,000
Brethren, German Baptists (Dunkers) :			
Brethren Church (Progres- sive Dunkers) .....	1944	109	17,669
**Church of the Brethren (Conservative Dunkers)...	1944	1,019	180,287
Church of God (New Dunk- ers) .....	1944	8	526
Old German Baptist Breth- ren .....	1936	62	3,271
Plymouth Brethren .....	1936	664	25,806
Brethren, River:			
Old Order or Yorker Breth- ren .....	1936	7	291
Brethren in Christ.....	1944	142	5,171
United Zion's Children.....	1940	22	1,025
Buddhist Churches of America.	1940	46	70,000
Catholic Apostolic Church....	1936	7	2,577
Christadelphians .....	1936	109	2,755
Christian and Missionary Alli- ance .....	1943	879	40,283
Christian Nation Church.....	1936	5	112

Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Total Member- ship
Christian Union .....	1938	220	15,400
Christ's Sanctified Holy Church.	1944	32	831
Church of Christ Holiness U.S.A. ....	1944	134	11,751
Church of Christ, Scientist.....	1936	2,113	268,915
Church of Eternal Life.....	1940	2	113
Churches of God:			
Church of God.....	1944	1,817	67,137
Church of God (Anderson, Ind.) .....	1942	1,412	83,875
Church of God, Seventh Day.	1936	39	1,154
The (Original) Church of God .....	1944	58	5,000
*The Church of God.....	1942	777	20,065
The Church of God.....	1944	145	20,000
Church of God and Saints of Christ .....	1936	213	37,084
Church of God in Christ.....	1944	2,000	300,000
Church of the East and of the Assyrians .....	1944	10	3,000
Church of the Gospel.....	1940	5	47
Church of the Nazarene.....	1944	2,965	187,082
The Church of Revelation.....	1944	3	879
Churches of Christ.....	1936	3,815	309,551
*Churches of Christ in Christian Union of Ohio.....	1942	113	4,000
Churches of God, Holiness.....	1936	35	5,872
Churches of God in N. America (General Eldership) .....	1944	397	33,563

Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Total Member- ship
Churches of the Living God:			
Church of the Living God (Christian Workers for Fellowship) .....	1944	6	120
The Church of the Living God, The Pillar and Ground of the Truth.....	1936	119	4,838
Churches of the New Jerusalem:			
General Convention of the New Jerusalem in the U.S. A. ....	1943	77	5,175
General Church of the New Jerusalem .....	1943	12	1,387
**Congregational Christian Churches .....	1943	5,753	1,075,401
Congregational Holiness Church .....	1944	86	2,849
**Disciples of Christ.....	1944	7,917	1,672,354
Divine Science College and Church .....	1936	18	4,085
Eastern Orthodox Churches:			
Albanian Orthodox Church..	1936	13	3,137
American Holy Orthodox Catholic Apostolic Eastern Church .....	1944	5	1,325
Apostolic Episcopal Church..	1942	11	6,389
Bulgarian Orthodox Church..	1940	6	1,336
Greek Orthodox Church (Hel- lenic) .....	1944	280	250,000

Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Total Member- ship
Holy Orthodox Church in America (Eastern Catholic and Apostolic) . . . . .	1944	14	1,300
Roumenian Orthodox Church . . . . .	1944	42	21,000
**Russian Orthodox Church . . . . .	1942	300	300,000
Serbian Orthodox Church . . . . .	1944	43	42,000
**Syrian Antiochian Ortho- dox Church . . . . .	1942	76	20,300
**Ukranian Orthodox Church in America . . . . .	1945	44	39,500
Erieside Church . . . . .	1944	1	66
**Evangelical and Reformed Church . . . . .	1943	2,835	675,958
Evangelical Church . . . . .	1944	1,994	255,881
Evangelical Congregational Ch. . . . .	1944	160	25,952
Evangelistic Associations:			
Apostolic Christian Church, Nazarean . . . . .	1936	31	1,663
Apostolic Christian Church of America . . . . .	1943	53	6,425
Apostolic Faith Mission . . . . .	1936	17	2,288
The Christian Congregation . . . . .	1944	26	3,820
Church of Daniel's Band . . . . .	1944	3	131
Church of God (Apostolic) . . . . .	1938	49	3,085
Church of God as Organized by Christ . . . . .	1938	14	2,192
Hephzibah Faith Missionary Association . . . . .	1944	20	350
Metropolitan Church Associa- tion . . . . .	1936	14	961

Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Total Member- ship
*Missionary Bands of the World .....	1944	6	190
*Missionary Church Associa- tion .....	1942	58	5,000
Pillar of Fire.....	1936	61	4,044
Faith Tabernacle .....	1942	1	200
Federated Churches .....	1936	508	88,411
Fire Baptized Holiness Church.	1940	300	6,000
Free Christian Zion Church of Christ .....	1944	37	2,478
Friends:			
Primitive Friends .....	1936	1	13
Religious Society of Friends (Conservative) .....	1936	13	3,351
Religious Society of Friends (General Conference) ....	1943	154	17,870
**Religious Society of Friends (Five Years Meeting).....	1944	453	70,000
Religious Society of Friends (Philadelphia Vicinity)...	1943	33	4,966
Religious Society of Friends (Kansas Yearly Meeting) ..	1944	88	8,233
*Oregon Yearly Meeting of the Friends Church.....	1944	38	3,691
*Ohio Yearly Meeting of the Friends Church .....	1944	70	5,175
Religious Society of Friends (Central Yearly Meeting).	1944	12	770
Holiness Church .....	1944	23	453
Holiness Church of God, Inc...	1944	22	587



Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Total Member- ship
House of David.....	1944	1	350
House of God, Holy Church of the Living God, the Pillar and the Ground of the Truth, House of Prayer for all People .....	1936	4	200
House of the Lord.....	1936	4	302
Church of Illumination.....	1945	7	5,000
Independent Churches .....	1936	384	40,275
Independent Fundamental Churches of America.....	1944	600	60,000
Independent Negro Churches...	1936	50	12,337
International Church of the Four Square Gospel.....	1944	416	21,728
Italian Bodies:			
General Council of the Italian Pentecostal Assemblies of God .....	1936	16	1,547
Unorganized Italian Christian Churches .....	1936	104	9,567
Jewish Congregations .....	1936	3,728	4,641,184
Kodesh Church of Immanuel...	1936	9	562
Latter Day Saints:			
The Church of Christ (Tem- ple Lot) .....	1940	56	2,179
The Church of Jesus Christ (Bickertonites) .....	1944	24	1,550
Church of Jesus Christ (Cut- lerites) .....	1944	2	24

Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Total Member- ship
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.....	1944	1,757	870,346
Church of Jesus Christ (Strangites) .....	1936	4	123
Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints	1944	563	113,064
The Latter House of the Lord (Apostolic Faith) .....	1936	2	29
Liberal Catholic Church.....	1940	34	2,000
Lithuanian National Reformed Church .....	1940	6	3,325
Lutherans:			
American Lutheran Confer- ence:			
American Lutheran Ch....	1944	1,834	584,499
Evangelical Lutheran Au- gustana Synod of North America .....	1943	1,123	373,163
Norwegian Lutheran Church of America.....	1943	2,522	595,034
Lutheran Free Church....	1943	360	49,583
United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America .....	1943	170	34,628
Lutheran Synodical Confer- ference of N.A.:			
Evangelical Lutheran Syn- od of Missouri, Ohio, and other States .....	1944	4,073	1,356,655

Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Total Member- ship
Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States .....	1943	914	324,492
The Slovak Evangelical Lu- theran Church .....	1943	60	22,186
Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church .....	1943	70	8,853
Negro Missions .....	1944	89	11,521
**The United Lutheran Church in America.....	1943	3,762	1,690,204
Church of the Lutheran Brethren in America.....	1940	28	2,250
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Eielsen Syn- od) .....	1944	14	1,400
Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church .....	1943	65	14,511
Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church (Suomi Synod)...	1944	237	28,365
Finnish Evangelical Lutheran National Church in Amer- ica .....	1942	72	5,928
Icelandic Evangelical Luther- an Synod of N.A.....	1941	16	1,386
Danish Evangelical Lutheran Ch. in America.....	1943	87	18,813
The Protestant Conference (Lutheran) .....	1936	22	3,253

Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Total Member- ship
Independent Lutheran			
Churches .....	1936	15	2,423
Mayan Temple .....	1944	5	2,916
Mennonite Bodies:			
Central Conference of Men-			
nonites .....	1944	22	3,216
Church of God in Christ			
(Mennonite) .....	1945	30	3,000
*Conference of the Defence-			
less Mennonites of N.A. ....	1943	12	1,626
Evangelical Mennonite			
Brethren .....	1944	11	1,240
Conservative Amish Mennon-			
ite Church .....	1944	22	3,936
*General Conference of the			
Mennonite Church of N.A. ....	1945	240	40,000
Hutterian Brethren .....	1942	7	265
Krimmer Mennonite Breth-			
ren Conference .....	1940	12	1,558
*Mennonite Brethren in			
Christ .....	1943	147	10,061
*Mennonite Brethren Church			
of N.A. ....	1941	135	16,125
Mennonite Church .....	1944	500	51,813
Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde.	1936	2	275
Old Order Amish Mennonite			
Church .....	1944	155	13,408
Old Order Mennonite Church			
(Wisler) .....	1944	30	2,975
Reformed Mennonite Church.	1942	25	1,500

Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Total Member- ship
Stauffer Mennonite Church..	1944	2	167
Unaffiliated Mennonite Con- gregations .....	1944	5	422
Methodist Bodies:			
**African Methodist Episco- pal Church .....	1942	7,265	868,735
**African Methodist Episco- pal Zion Church.....	1944	2,252	489,244
African Union First Colored Methodist Protestant Church .....	1944	36	2,597
Apostolic Methodist Church..	1936	2	31
**Colored Methodist Episco- pal Church .....	1944	4,400	382,000
*Congregational Methodist Church .....	1941	175	16,163
Congregational Methodist Church of America.....	1944	81	6,593
*Free Methodist Church of N.A. ....	1944	1,172	46,783
*Holiness Methodist Church.	1942	7	578
The Independent A.M.E. De- nomination .....	1940	12	1,000
**The Methodist Church....	1944	41,067	8,046,129
New Congregational Method- ist Church .....	1936	25	1,449
Primitive Methodist Church..	1942	88	12,185
Reformed Methodist Church.	1944	13	326
Reformed Methodist Union Episcopal Church.....	1942	43	3,000



Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Total Member- ship
Reformed New Congregation- al Methodist Church.....	1936	8	329
Reformed Zion Union Apos- tolic Church .....	1943	52	3,000
Union American Methodist Episcopal Church .....	1936	71	9,369
*Wesleyan Methodist Connee- tion of America.....	1944	820	29,331
Southern Methodist Church..	1944	48	6,000
Moravian Bodies:			
Bohemian and Moravian Brethren .....	1944	2	250
**Evangelical Unity of Bohe- mian and Moravian Breth- ren in N.A.....	1940	41	4,538
**Moravian Church (Unitas Fratrum) .....	1944	145	40,764
National David Spiritual Tem- ple of Christ Church Union (Inc.), U.S.A.....	1944	30	15,898
New Apostolic Church of N.A...	1945	66	5,535
Old Catholic Churches:			
The American Catholic Church Archdiocese of N.Y.	1940	4	1,400
The American Catholic Church (Syro-Antiochian).	1943	22	3,162
The Old Catholic Church in America .....	1940	28	6,274

Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Total Member- ship
Pentecostal Assemblies:			
Pentecostal Fire-Baptized Holiness Church.....	1944	71	1,900
Church of God in Christ (Pentecostal) .....	1936	9	210
Pentecostal Assemblies of Jesus Christ, Inc.....	1942	450	17,000
*International Pentecostal Assemblies .....	1936	98	6,333
Pentecostal Assemblies of the World .....	1936	87	5,713
Pentecostal Church of God of America .....	1944	601	37,048
Pentecostal Church, Inc.....	1944	400	20,000
Calvary Pentecostal Church, Inc. ....	1944	35	20,000
*Pentecostal Holiness Church.	1944	714	24,910
Pilgrim Holiness Church.....	1944	746	25,668
Polish National Catholic Ch....	1944	146	250,000
Presbyterian Bodies:			
Associate Reformed Presbyte- rian Church (General Syn- od) .....	1944	142	23,385
Associate Presbyterian Church of N.A.....	1940	8	250
Colored Cumberland Presby- terian Church.....	1944	121	30,000
Cumberland Presbyterian Church .....	1944	1,048	64,984

Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Total Member- ship
**Presbyterian Church in the U.S. ....	1944	3,500	565,853
**Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. ....	1944	8,462	2,040,399
Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, General Synod.....	1944	11	1,559
The Orthodox Presbyterian Church .....	1944	74	7,084
*Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (Old School).....	1944	80	6,617
**United Presbyterian Church of North America.	1944	847	193,637
**The Protestant Episcopal Church .....	1944	7,894	2,227,524
Reformed Bodies:			
*Christian Reformed Church.	1944	310	128,914
Free Magyar Reformed Church in America.....	1942	21	6,126
**Reformed Church in Amer- ica .....	1944	736	169,390
Reformed Episcopal Church...	1944	67	8,939
The Roman Catholic Church...	1944	14,791	23,419,701
The Salvation Army.....	1944	1,474	208,329
Scandinavian Evangelical Bodies:			
*Norwegian and Danish Ev- angelical Free Church As- sociation of N.A.....	1944	51	10,033

Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Total Member- ship
Evangelical Free Church of America .....	1943	147	11,052
Evangelical Mission Covenant Church of America.....	1944	446	48,000
Swenkfelders .....	1942	5	2,050
Social Brethren .....	1940	14	521
Spiritualists:			
International General Assem- bly of Spiritualists.....	1945	236	100,000
The National Christian Spir- itual Alliance .....	1944	267	5,487
National Spiritualist Associa- tion, Inc. ....	1936	258	11,266
Progressive Spiritual Church.	1936	21	11,347
Triumph the Church and King- dom of God in Christ.....	1940	400Est.	30,000Est.
Unitarian Churches.....	1944	364	62,593
United Brethren Bodies:			
**United Brethren in Christ..	1944	2,748	433,480
United Christian Church....	1942	14	676
United Brethren in Christ (Old Constitution) .....	1936	248	15,401
United Holy Church in America, Inc. ....	1944	275	25,000
Universal Emancipation Ch....	1936	1	18
The Universalist Church in America .....	1945	478	47,541
Vendanta Society .....	1942	1	30
Volunteers of America.....	1942	94	4,230
No. of Statistical Reports: 256		253,762	72,492,669

These statistics are used by permission. They appear in the Yearbook of American Churches, 1945, published by the Sowers Printing Company, Lebanon, Pa.

Of the 256 religious bodies listed above there are 55 having each 50,000 or more members. These 55 bodies total 70,623,989 members while the remaining 201 bodies total only 1,868,680. The 55 larger bodies contain over 97 per cent of the church membership of the nation, while the 201 smaller bodies total only 2.6 per cent.

\* Churches which are members of the National Association of Evangelicals. Of the 27 affiliated denominations 22 are indicated above which have a total membership of 722,095. There are 5 small bodies that do not appear in the above list. The Association, in addition to these denominations, has 60 member organizations. It was organized in 1941.

\*\* Churches which are members of The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America. The 24 affiliated denominations in the United States have a total membership of 27,769,809. The United Church of Canada, which has 694,374 members, is also an affiliated body.



# REFORMED CHURCHES THE WORLD OVER PRESBYTERIAL IN THEIR GOVERNMENT

A. NORTH AMERICA (AND S. A.)					
Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Communi- cants Members	Total Members	Note
Presb. Ch. in the U.S.A.....	1944	8,462		2,040,399	1
Presb. Ch. in the U.S.....	1944	3,500		565,853	2
Cumberland Presb. Ch. ....	1944	1,048		64,984	
Cumberland Presb. Ch. (colored) .	1944	121		30,000	
United Presb. Church.....	1944	847		193,637	3
Reformed Presb. Ch. (Old School) .	1944	80		6,617	
Reformed Presb. Ch. (Gen. Synod) .....	1944	11		1,559	
Orthodox Presb. Church.....	1944	74		7,084	
Associate Reformed Presb. Synod.	1944	142		23,385	
Associate Synod of North America.	1944	8		250	
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Evangelical & Reformed Ch. in U.S. ....	1943	2,835		675,958	4
Reformed Ch. in America.....	1944	736	169,390	227,436	5
Christian Reformed Church.....	1945	312	74,778	132,990	
Protestant Reformed Ch. ....	1945	23	2,550	4,984	

Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Commu- nicant Members	Total Members	Note
Presb. Ch. in Canada.....	1937	905	179,959	694,374	6
United Ch. of Canada.....	1937	2,884			
Presb. Ch. of Prince Edward Island .....	1937	3	650	1,500	
Presb. Ch. in Mexico.....	1937	80	5,195		
Presb. Ch. of Jamaica.....	1910		13,000		
<hr/>					
Approximate Total—South Amer..	1937	474	64,599	121,453	
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B. EUROPE					
Church of Scotland (State).....	1937	2,602		1,288,648	7
United Free Ch. of Scotland.....	1910	1,631		506,088	7
Free Ch. of Scotland.....	1937	138	5,542	21,776	8
Free Presb. Ch. of Scotland.....	1937	27			9
Reformed Presb. Ch. of Scotland..	1937	8	790	1,420	
United Original Secession Ch. of Scotland .....	1937	21		2,753	
Presb. Ch. of England.....	1937	347		81,715	

Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Commu- nicant Members	Total Members	Note
Presb. Ch. of Wales.....	1937	1,488	182,221	1,035,058	10
Presb. Ch. in Ireland.....	1937	548		113,811	
Reformed Presb. Ch. in Ireland...	1937	41		3,559	
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Reformed Ch. of Netherlands (State) .....	1937	1,435	799,971	1,420,564	11
Reformed Churches of the Neth- erlands .....	1937	782	308,523	583,564	12
Christian Reformed Ch. of the Netherlands .....	1938			43,582	13
Reformed Ch. Bentheim & East Frisia .....	1937	13	2,386	4,272	14
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Union Evangelical Churches of Belgium .....	1937	19	2,500	18,000	
Mission Christian Union in Belgium .....	1937	30	5,957	7,954	
Reformed Evangelical Churches of France .....	1937	446	60,000 (?)	200,000 (?)	15

Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Commu- nicant Members	Total Members	Note
Free Evangelical Churches of					
France .....	1937	39	2,700	6,000	15
Reformed Churches of France....	1937	155		111,000(?)	15
Reformed Churches in Alsace &					
Lorraine .....	1937	52	19,750	54,000	
Spanish Evangelical Church.....	1937	28	1,000(?)	3,000(?)	
Spanish Mission—Irish Presb.....	1937	5	175	248	
<hr/>					
Evang. Ch. Hanover, Germany...1937		122	26,000	155,000	
Reformed Ch. of Lippe, Germany.1937		43	23,000	154,072	16
Evang. United Ch. Prussia (partly) .....	1937	92	70,000	450,000	
Evang. Reformed Churches of					
Germany .....	1937	18	5,000	45,000	
Free German Huguenot Synod...1937		24		20,365	
Free Evang. Churches of Swit-					
zerland .....	1937	400(?)	400,000(?)	400,000(?)	
Free Evang. Ch. at Vaud.....1937		48	5,371	15,170	
Free Evang. Ch. of Neuchatel....1937		25	15,311	20,000(?)	

Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Communi- cants Members	Total Members	Note
Free Evang. Ch. at Geneva.....	1937	4	895		
National Protestant Ch. at Geneva.....	1937	25	16,000		
Waldensian Ch. of Italy.....	1937	80	19,400	26,600	
<hr/>					
Reformed Helvetic Ch. of Austria.....	1937	6		14,000	
Reformed Church of Hungary.....	1937	1,048	973,393	1,849,266	
Evang. Ch. of Bohemian Brethren.....	1937	194		282,000	
Reformed Ch. of Slovakia & Ruthenia .....	1937	430	154,000	219,000	
Evang. Reformed Ch. of Poland.....	1937	8	1,063	1,231	
Evang. Ch. of A&H Conf. Poland.....	1937	17	2,592	3,970	
United Evang. Ch. Southern Poland .....	1937	8	740		
Reformed Ch. in Lithuania.....	1937	11	13,592	13,779	
Reformed Ch. in Latvia.....	1937	2	390	1,060	
Reformed Ch. in Roumania.....	1937	801		750,000	
Reformed Ch. in Jugoslavia.....	1937	53	35,000	55,890	
Greek Evang. Churches.....	1937	11	1,032	3,100	
Russia .....		?	?	?	



## C. AFRICA, ASIA, AND AUSTRALASIA

Name of Religious Body	Year	Number of Churches	Commu- nicant Members	Total Members	Note
Presb. Ch. of S. Africa.....	1910	68	12,000		
Dutch Reformed Ch. of S. Africa...	1930		354,437	703,318	17
Dutch Reformed (Herv.) Ch. of S. Africa .....	1931		25,820	55,803	18
Reformed Ch. of S. Africa.....	1931		26,140	49,636	19
Approximate Total for Asia.....	1937	4,684	597,931	980,798	
Reformed Ch. in Dutch East Indies .....	1937	33	22,706		
Native Reformed Ch. Dutch East Indies .....	1937	30	14,000		
Presb. Ch. of Australia.....	1937	571	94,541	290,026	
Presb. Ch. of New Zealand.....	1937	254	58,096	196,899	
Approximate Grand World Total .....	1937 (?)	41,510	16,604,635		20

*1st Note.*—The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. had its origin in the established Church of Scotland. It is located in the northern States.

*2d Note.*—The Presbyterian Church in the U. S. is in the southern States. Differences over the slavery question led to its separation at the time of the Civil War. It also had its origin in the established Church of Scotland. With the question before it of union with the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. in 1946 refused to agree to such union because "there is manifestly a radical difference in viewpoint in the two Churches as to the interpretation and administration of the Standards."

*3d Note.*—The United Presbyterian Church did not originate in the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland which was in existence from 1847 to 1900. The United Presbyterian Church of this country is a union of two former American Churches, the Associate Presbyterian and the Reformed Presbyterian. The United Presbyterian Church is the American representative of dissent in Scotland in the eighteenth century.

*4th Note.*—The Evangelical and Reformed Church in the United States is a united Church. It is composed of the former (German) Reformed Church in the U.S. and the Evangelical Synod of North America, which were united in 1934. The latter Church consisted of Reformed and Lutheran people who accepted both Reformed and Lutheran Standards.

*5th Note.*—The Reformed Church in America was formerly known as the Dutch Reformed Church. Of all Churches

in America holding the presbyterial system of government this Church is the oldest. It had its origin in the established Reformed Church of the Netherlands, from which it declared its independence in 1785.

*6th Note.*—The figures concerning the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and all figures preceded by the year 1937 were obtained from the pages 294-310 of a publication given out by the Fifteenth General Council of the Alliance of Reformed Churches Holding the Presbyterial System. Before World War II this Council met every four years. It met last in Montreal, Canada in 1937.

*7th Note.*—The United Free Church of Scotland in 1925 had 534,000 communicant members. It dates from 1900 when a union was effected between the former United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1847-1900, and the former Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900. At the time of union the former had 200,000 members and the latter 350,000. In 1929 The United Free Church of Scotland became joined with the established Church of Scotland.

*8th Note.*—The Free Church of Scotland is a small group that refused to go along with the union of 1900 of which the 7th Note speaks.

*9th Note.*—The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland is another small group that would not join the aforesaid union of 1900. These churches are in the Scottish highlands.

*10th Note.*—The large Presbyterian Church of Wales has the peculiarity that it does not empower its General

Assembly with supreme authority. At the beginning of the nineteenth century this Church bore the name "Calvinistic Methodist Connection." In over three-fourths of its churches the Welsh language is used.

*11th Note.*—The established Reformed Church of the Netherlands suffered from 1795 to 1816 due to lack of financial support from the State. When William I became king in 1816, he offered to support the Church if it would accept a constitution modified to suit his views. The Church yielded and its form of government became bureaucratic. Dissatisfaction with that new form of government led to a schism in 1834 and the beginning of the Christian Reformed Church of the Netherlands; later, after 1892, called the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. The Constitution of 1816 of the established Reformed Church of the Netherlands was greatly revised in 1852, the State relinquishing most of its authority over the Church. The government still supports the Church but otherwise has little to do with it. One source gives the total membership of the established Church as 2,750,000 in 1930.

*12th Note.*—The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands had their origin in 1834 and 1886 in two secessions from the established Reformed Church. The two groups united in 1892. A schism at the present time is rending from it about 8 to 10% of its membership. The new denomination bears the name Reformed Churches (Art. 31 C. O.).

*13th Note.*—The Christian Reformed Church of the Netherlands is a group that would not go along with the

aforesaid union of 1892 and retained the name they had previously.

*14th Note.*—The Reformed Churches of Bentheim and East Frisia, though located in Germany, are however a part of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands.

*15th Note.*—The Reformed churches of France are weak as to their Reformed character. Almost none of its ministers subscribes unconditionally to the Reformed Standards.

*16th Note.*—The Reformed Church of Lippe, Germany has the Heidelberg Catechism as one of its Standards.

*17th Note.*—The Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa is known there as *De Nederlandsche Gereformeerde Kerk in Zuid Afrika*. Its membership represents about 45 per cent of the white population. The other two Reformed Churches in South Africa represent each about 2 or 3 per cent of the white population. In church government the Dutch Reformed Church has gone in the direction of collegialism. It contains a modern-minded, evangelical group and also an orthodox, Calvinistic group. It is located in the Cape, Orange Free State, and Natal Provinces. The churches of each province meet separately in their own Classes; and, once every three years, in their own Synod. This is true also of the churches in the Transvaal province described under the following note.

*18th Note.*—The Dutch Reformed (*Hervormde*) Church of South Africa is known there as *De Hervormde Kerk* or *De Vereenigde Kerk*. It is partially united with the



aforesaid Dutch Reformed Church. It is located in the Transvaal province and was organized in 1852. It had 22 active ministers in 1931.

*19th Note.*—The Reformed Church of South Africa is known there as *Die Gereformeerde Kerk*. It is located in all four provinces. It was organized in 1859, and in 1931 had 40 active ministers. This Church is closely related to the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands and to the Christian Reformed Church of this country. Its revised Church Order is based upon the revision made in the Netherlands in 1905, as is also that of the Christian Reformed Church of this country. In the Free State province of South Africa these churches meet once a year in a provincial Synod but in the Cape and Transvaal provinces they meet in Classes once or twice a year. Annually the churches of the last two provinces meet also in their respective Particular or Provincial Synods. Once in three years the churches of all four provinces meet in a General Synod.

*20th Note.*—These figures are only an approximation which is likely lower than the actual number. Some of the denominations do not list the number of churches so that the figure 41,510 is incomplete. The figure 16,604,635 indicates total membership. In the case of those denominations which do not give total membership, their figure for communicant membership was added instead. The people represented by these figures are by no means all strictly and conservatively Reformed. The only thing that can be said of them is that they belong to Churches holding the presbyterial system of church government.

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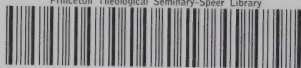
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